UNDER THE ARCH

LADY HENRY SOMERSET

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By
LADY HENRY SOMERSET
Author of
"*Sketches in Black and White*"

"Under the arch of life, where love and death,
Terror and mystery, guard her shrine, I saw
Beauty enthroned;"
—DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

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To

MY MOTHER

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Lady Cliffe, a young married woman, brilliant, impassionate, and sentimental, who learns of the things which she suffers.

Sir John Cliffe, a straightforward, unromantic Englishman.

Elizabeth Maynell, an imaginative girl much impressed by the sorrows of the people, who determines when her own happiness is shipwrecked to live for their good.

Eric Errington, artistic, self-absorbed, vain, and unscrupulous, but very attractive to women.

Michael Fane, a socialist, impetuous, frank, and true to his ideals, but too much absorbed in his work to notice the details which affect the happiness of others.

Old Mr. Errington, a wealthy banker.

His Submissive Wife.

Miss Osterley, who is always hunting a social grievance.

Father Martin, an old man with a strong power of sympathy and the wisdom of wide experience.

Billy and Sally, slum children who live in the Court in which Elizabeth works.

Lady Hornden, Lady Cliffe's mother; foolish, worldly; the desire to see her daughter happy the only reality in her artificial life.

Mrs. Rodney, a society woman.

Lady Augusta Leaven, who desires to be a social success and a philanthropist.

Martha, Elizabeth's old nurse.

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CHAPTER I

"WILL you have another egg?"

The voice that spoke these words was subdued, and the face of the pretty fair-haired young woman was very grave. Opposite to her sat the man to whom the question was addressed; a tall, sunburnt, broad-shouldered man, who would everywhere be recognized as an Englishman, with crisp, curly hair, and the general appearance of having just come out of his bath. He was eating his breakfast in silence. He too looked subdued and solemn.

"No, thank you," he said, looking up at her for a moment.

"It is horrible," she said; "I feel as if it were dreadful to talk, and yet impossible to be silent. It always appears to me that it requires real courage to be the first person after a death to ask any member of the family what they will have to eat. It seems like disrespect for the dead; and yet it's got to be done by someone, you know, Jack."

"That is an unfortunate simile to use to-day," said Jack. "I am not dead, and I hope I may not be just yet."

"Of course not; there would be no difficulty in that direction with the corpse. You are among the bereaved. But seriously, do let us talk right up to the last about

anything, everything, only let us talk. These last days have been so awful, the whole house smelling like a saddler's shop, and every horrible old relation whose existence one had forgotten coming to poke round the kit and try to understand the use of each aluminium cooking pot."

"Well, it will be over soon," said Jack.

"Oh, don't Jack; you talk like a man in a jail, eating his last breakfast before being hanged."

"Perhaps it is a last breakfast," said Jack slowly. "Come, Kit, old girl, let's drop this dreary chaff. I must try and get some business done. I wonder if you understand Rodgers will pay you the cheques quarterly; anything you want you must ask him for. He will look after everything, only, of course, you won't run amuck? But he's got enough to meet all your reasonable wants."

"All right," she answered. "I won't go to Paris and order a thousand gowns and three trousseaux of underlinen; but after all, nowadays, it's only a man who is capable of that."

She was talking for the sake of saying something, and as she did so the color came and went quickly, and the thin hands nervously rolled the crumbs of bread into little hard balls. At last Jack pushed back his chair and rose, throwing his napkin down on the floor.

"I must go out for a few minutes," he said, as he stood by her. "I shan't be gone long, and we must start at eleven o'clock."

"Out?" said Katherine, looking at him, her great shining blue eyes turned up to his face. "Out? Why it's almost time to go."

"Yes, I know," he answered; "but it's only for a little while."

A moment more and he was gone. She heard the hall door bang as she still sat on at the breakfast table,

resting her chin on her hands, and looking out over the dreary London leads, thinly veiled by the white muslin curtains. In less than two hours he would be gone.

"How I wish I really knew what I felt about anything," she thought. "Sometimes I am sick at heart at the thought of the long distance, and the risk, and all it means for him. Sometimes I almost feel that the separation will be good, that to have freedom, and not to be expected to love anybody, will be a relief. Poor, poor old Jack, and poor little me. I wonder which is real, my sorrow, or my little bit of content. I don't know. I always feel I am two people. My mind is constantly trying to climb out of one self into the other, and yet both seem the real me."

She rose slowly and went to the glass and looked vacantly into it, as though she hardly recognized herself. She patted, almost unconsciously, some stray curls on her forehead, and then lesiurely left the room to give some orders to the servants.

Presently the banging of the front door announced her husband's return, and she heard his voice calling to her to put on her hat, as the carriage would be round at once. And when she came down the stairs and crossed the hall she felt as though she walked in a dream. She saw him shake hands with the butler, while tears ran down the old man's face.

"Good-bye, Sir John. God bless you, and give you 'ealth and a safe return to 'er ladyship. God keep you safe, Sir John," he said, as he still grasped his hand. "I never thought when you was little, and I used to 'elp you play soldiers, I should live to see this day; but you may rely on me taking all care of everything, whether you comes back or not," and he turned away, ashamed of his grief.

"Oh, it'll be all right, Lane," said his master. "You

mind everything, and I shall be home soon to tell you all about the splendid time I shall have had. Good-bye, George," he said to the footman, who looked all unprepared with a speech, hot and shiny after carrying luggage.

But another good-bye had to be said.

"No, old man, no." The shiny nose was rubbed against his hand. "No, Nip, old boy, I can't take you," and for the first and only time his voice shook for a moment, as he ran his hand over the rough stubby head.

"Take care of him, old girl," he said to his wife, as they got into the brougham. "Is my bag in, and my coat? That's all"; and as if it were a relief, he called, "Go on," and the horses moved forward.

There is no place which has a more prosaic outward manifestation than a railway station, and yet on no stage is the drama of life more vividly enacted. The little servant girl goes to her first place, and struggles to be cheerful in that trying moment of first parting. She pokes her chubby face through the train window and gasps her last farewells.

"Tike care of mother, kiss oant, tike care of yerself," all these unceasing injunctions to stifle the sob that shall not come, and, waving her little red hand, she is borne to the unknown.

The newly-married couple try to look indifferent as they walk up to the platform, until the grain of rice, or the more squalid confetti, betrays them, as they take their seats as far from one another as possible. The station is the first act of that new life, with all its potentialities of happiness or suffering.

Three men have entered another compartment, one dressed in brown, with the King's brand on his clothes. For him too a new life opens. He too has said good-bye to the freedom of the old life, but he is now fast bound in misery and iron. By-and-by, at midnight, in the

long shadows of the arc lights, there will stand black figures who lift a coffin into the train, and take their loved one for the last journey.

To-day the mixture of tragedy and comedy is complete. Some go on holiday. The early spring has beckoned them away from the gray streets and dingy squares, and has called them with enchanting voices to sunshine, fields and flowers. But for the most part, dust-colored garbs proclaim the departure of men whose faces are set, women flushed or pale, with forced smiles and foolish little jests, whose laughter is nearer tears.

As Sir John's brougham drove up under the glazed archway he put his head out of the window and then hastily withdrew it.

"By Jove!" he said; "your mother has come. I thought I had said good-bye to her; I didn't know she would be here."

"Oh, bother," responded Lady Cliffe. "She loves a scene; she is never happy unless she can be the centre of some fuss, and she will drive me mad when you are gone."

"Just tell her to leave you alone," said Jack, with that splendid ignoring of the possible, characteristic of his sex. They stood for a moment at the ticket office. A tall and still handsome woman, dressed in long draperies exquisitely made, and carefully arranged to suit her figure, came to meet them.

"My darlings," she said, "my heart is bleeding for you; I could not resist the last blessing. My beautiful child, you have not slept all night; there are purple rings round your eyes. I know you've been weeping. I don't wonder. Jack never looked so wonderfully handsome—a perfect god in his khaki."

"For God's sake, dear lady, don't talk nonsense," said Jack, flushing. "The whole station will hear you."

"My child," said Lady Hornden, turning once more to her daughter, "I think I am suffering more than you. When a mother feels for her child in sorrow the anguish is greater than her own."

"Well, mother, we won't compare anguishes just now. There's Mary Wennington. I didn't know she was going."

"Oh, didn't you?" said her mother. "But, of course, she's here because Arthur Warley is going. Such a scene I saw before you came up. There they were, holding each other's hands behind the waiting-room door. I came away at once. But, my dear, what can he see in her? She's frightful, and her hat so inappropriate. Now I like yours; there is a little grief bend in it which speaks of tears, and all the coloring of that mole-colored cloth is so subdued and harmonious."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't talk clothes," said Katherine, edging away. "See, there's Mr. Farningham; he's looking for you."

The man she beckoned came up, effusively shaking hands. Lady Hornden held his hand for two or three minutes, explaining minutely all she was experiencing at that terrible moment of parting. Mr. Farningham was one of those elderly men who are content to descend the hill of life clasping the hand of a dowager. The higher the rank the happier the journey, and he was only too glad to pour out his condolences.

"Yes, I know," he murmured, "but you are so brave, so heroic. What a strength you will be for poor dear Lady Cliffe to lean on. Oh, forgive me, but what a sleeve! I worship such lines at that. Swanz, of course; no one but a Viennese could have built it. I always know the Viennese hand from the Parisian; it is so much more *grand-dame*."

"Dear man, you have the eye of genius," said Lady

Hornden, smiling delightedly upon him. "Dine with me to-night, and go to the play. There is a new piece with Mary Milton. I am told she is perfect, just naughty enough, and not too naughty." And then they fell to discussing different groups on the platform, able to be light-hearted, for to them there was no tragedy of parting.

Sir John and his wife walked slowly together toward the reserved carriage. The scene was still a dream to her. What could she feel? Her head was dull and heavy. She hoped she could cry when he left, and then reproached herself for ever doubting the possibility.

Another khaki figure walked down the platform to meet her, a tall, slight, fair man, with clear blue eyes, and a mouth which was drawn on his face with clean lines like one of Holbein's drawings.

"Lady Cliffe," he said, "I'm awfully glad to see you to say good-bye. Wish me luck, won't you?"

Jack walked on after slapping him on the back, saying:

"Hullo, old fellow, I wish you were coming with our lot, instead of that confounded yeomanry."

Errington smiled, and showed a gleam of white even teeth; but his eyes looked sad.

"See here," he said, in a low voice to Katherine; "I want you awfully to do something for me. My old dog is left at my hotel with my servant. Would it be asking too much for you to take care of him? I should be so grateful. He's awfully fond of me, and he will pine, I'm afraid; besides, I should like to think you had him."

"Of course I'll take him," said Katherine. "If he fights with Jack's dog I'll send Nip into the country." And then she bit her lip, feeling she had said a stupid thing. "I mean," she added, "of course they'll get on."

"Take your seats," roared the official.

"God bless you," said Eric Errington, as he took her hand. "Pray for me now and then." And he turned hastily away.

Jack came back, and, putting his arm round her, said:

"Good-bye, old girl; you remember all I told you about business and everything. Oh, damn!" he ejaculated, "here's your mother again."

"So the awful moment has come," said Lady Hornden, preparing for a final scene. "God bless you!" she said, as she folded him in her sleeves. "It seems terrible not to go with you to Southampton, but dearest Katherine told me you wished to go alone. See here! I forgot; this little flask is always to go with you, in case you are faint or wounded; and this stuff is the best thing on earth for sea-sickness. It cured a man I know who dies every time he crosses the Channel."

"Thank you," said Jack hoarsely, in a voice that had little of gratitude in it. Then almost shaking her from him, he turned to Katherine, who stood looking dumbly on. "Good-bye, dear old girl. God bless you. Keep well; don't overtire yourself," he said lamely. Somehow words didn't come easily.

There were groups all down the platform; loud laughter, but no merriment; hilarious voices, that somehow did not seem to speak in tune, said:

"We'll be back soon, now that Bobs has gone, and we shall give the Boers a real trouncing. We'll soon settle them. Keep your peckers up."

Jack looked out of the window and seemed to have no more words at his command. Katherine felt the moments were hours; but the little green flag waved at last.

"Good-bye, good-bye," said one and all. For how

long? For time, or till eternity? None knew; but the train glided out and on.

* * * * * *

Lady Hornden had just returned from the station to her house in Park Lane, had eaten her luncheon with unimpaired appetite, and after having changed her dress and draped herself in a clinging tea-gown was prepared for the usual stream of afternoon callers. The responsibility of selecting the right visitors rested with the butler, a great gentleman with a cold manner, who advanced in a mysterious way from the back of the hall, when the two footmen had thrown open the doors, to pronounce the word of admission or denial. If the guest was of no importance he would call to them from a distance in a strident voice:

"'Er ladyship is not at 'ome," but if, although judged unacceptable, the caller was of a social position which warranted respectful familiarity, he advanced himself, and unbending for a moment would offer to take a message, but the condescension was momentary and the distant demeanor soon resumed.

Once an unwary footman, whose training was still incomplete, committed the fearful indiscretion of admitting the country clergyman and his wife while a butler was upstairs announcing the French Ambassador. The man was sent away on the spot.

"To think," said Mr. Jennings, with almost despair in his voice, "that you 'ave so little tact or understanding that you could mix 'er ladyship's callers like that! You'd better go for an under butler, and mind plate, for you'll never understand the delicate dooties of the front door."

Lady Hornden had only adjusted her black drapery to her satisfaction against the old-gold brocade of the favorite seat, when Jennings threw open the drawing-room door and announced Mrs. Rodney.

"Dearest!" said Lady Hornden, rising and holding out both hands. "How sweet of you to come on such a day. My heart has been aching for you. You can understand how torn I am, too—my little Katherine—" Lady Hornden covered her face with her hand, on which glittered six diamond rings.

"I know just what it all means. Come and sit here, and let us talk about our troubles together."

The visitor was a tall, slender woman. At first you scarcely noticed her delicately moulded features. The eyes were the only thing which struck you—large and well set, it seemed as though the pigment had overflowed the line, for the whites were so blue that it was almost difficult to judge where the iris ended. It was a beautiful face, but the expression was hard. The eyes looked out on the world with steely brightness. The thin lips parted for a moment in mirth, but never drooped in sadness. She would have been more beautiful could she have looked plain for a day, her friends used to say.

"To tell you the truth," she said, "I have thought it all out, and I'm not going to make any trouble at all. Troubles are mistakes. They age you, and wear your temper, and then, when the people for whom you have lost your most priceless possessions come home, they only say you have ceased to be attractive."

She drew out a cigarette-case as she spoke, reached the match-box from among the innumerable silver knickknacks on the table, and lit a cigarette. Then lying back on a low arm-chair she lazily watched the long lines of blue smoke curl upward.

"You see, dear Lady Hornden, we can't all pretend to be like Katherine. George is gone, poor old dear, and lots of my pals, but there are still a few people left to play about with, and I don't mean to mope. I saw

Katherine at the station; she looked awfully white, but she'll get over it all right, like the rest of us."

Lady Hornden looked puzzled. It was not the principle that perplexed her; it was the crudeness of the statement. She was still early Victorian enough to like a thin layer of sentiment scraped over all questionable morality. She disliked the bald way in which things were spoken nowadays—things which she no doubt had herself done in her youth, but had never classified.

"My dear," said Lady Hornden, "you are so downright. Of course darling Katherine is heartbroken; but you are right, every woman owes it to herself to guard against that which destroys her charm. Did you see Lady Wennington at the station?" she added, glad to change the subject. "I thought she was a little too marked in her grief at saying good-bye to the wrong person. However, he certainly is a *mari complaisant.*"

"Of course he is," said Mrs. Rodney, "so is every man who is not a fool. By the way, Eric Errington went by the same train, didn't he? Volunteered, I hear, with the Blankshire Yoemanry. That's bad luck for Katherine; he would have kept up her spirits."

Mrs. Rodney turned her large bright eyes on Lady Hornden, and looked at her through the curling smoke. Women are divided into two species: those who guard their young with tiger-like fidelity, and those who are too selfish to have even this natural attribute. Lady Hornden belonged to the former, and in a moment her protective instincts were aroused.

"Oh dear no; if Eric had stayed Katherine would never have had the spirits to care to play with him or anyone else. She is absorbed in Jack. I have never seen such devotion in my life. When she dines here, she is looking at the clock all the time in order to get away the instant he is back from the club. If I go there,

she listens for him to come, and is so distracted that I never can get her to attend to what I am saying. She really is head over ears in love with him, and no wonder, for a more charming or devoted husband never lived. Poor old boy! I hope he'll come back safe." And she sighed a deep sigh and clasped her white hands on her black dress.

"I daresay," said Mrs. Rodney slowly, "that she's fond of Jack; but of course you know that Eric is devoted to her. And everybody knows that she liked Eric a little, only he hadn't any money, or much position, so you were wise."

Lady Hornden looked doubtfully at Mrs. Rodney. There were times when she feit that she almost hated her.

"Katherine," she said, after a pause, "was very young; she had beauty and money, a rare combination," she added, looking severely at her visitor, "and I was the guardian of her destiny. Of course I tried to influence her as I felt was for her good. That *was* my wisdom," said Lady Hornden bitterly.

"I don't blame you," said Mrs. Rodney. "I think from your point of view you were right, if you were sure Jack cared for her." I have always been told he was the one good young man in London; that he had no previous histories, not even the most pardonable little romance. Personally, I wouldn't give a fig for a man who knew nothing of the world."

At that moment the door was again thrown open, and Mr. Jennings announced, in the muffled voice of one who understands how to suit his manner to special occasions:

"Lady Cliffe."

Katherine was looking pale, with delicate blue shadows round her eyes.

"Mama," she said, "I thought I would come in to tell you I'm going to rest, and to save you from coming round. Hullo, Anne! I did not know you were here. So we've all foregathered to condole with each other." She sat down on a chair and smiled, but it was an effort at gayety that did not seem very successful. "Has mama been telling you what to wear and what to eat, and how to cook a new dish? She is my mainstay in the art of living."

"No," said Mrs. Rodney, lighting another cigarette from the stump of the old one; "we've been talking about you, and she says you're absolutely wrapped up in Jack, and don't care a fig for Eric, or any other of your old admirers. It's awfully touching," said Anne, putting the stump of the cigarette into the ash-tray. "*Femme du foyer*—what a beautiful rôle."

"Nonsense," said Katherine, growing pink in a moment. "I'm no better than anyone else. Jack's a good old thing, and I'm awfully fond of him. What are you doing with yourself to-day? Will you stay and play bridge? Very well, here we are; let's get a table. Will you, mama?"

And presently the three women were lost in that modern narcotic which dulls all care. The afternoon wore on, and only when the clock struck seven did Lady Hornden recollect that she was to dine with Mr. Farningham and go to the play.

"Your luck is monstrous, Anne," she said, as Mrs. Rodney gathered up the little heap of money that lay beside her. Then the three women kissed each other and parted.

Katherine Cliffe drove straight home; the evening was wet, foggy and cheerless. The hall of the old-fashioned London house looked cold and deserted. A few sticks and umbrellas and a covert coat of Jack's were still

in the stand. The room where the packing had been done had been tidied, but the writing materials on the table were disarranged, as he had left them. There is nothing so pathetic as the little things which belong to someone who has gone away on either a long or a short journey. They alone seem immutable. Who has not known the heartache which an old coat or a pair of worn gloves can bring? Who has not felt the dreary feeling of the unchangeableness of inanimate objects, when he returns to the home of long ago, and sees the same ornaments, the same pictures, but the living forms which were the centre, while these were the accessories, are gone never to return.

Nip was the only living creature to greet Katherine's entrance. His tail was wedged disconsolately between his hind legs; it wagged slowly and sadly, even when she patted his rough, broad head.

"Poor old boy!" she said, "do you miss your master?"

"Please, my lady," said the footman, who had taken her cloak and rug from the carriage, "there's a man 'ere with a dawg and a note; says as 'e's got orders to bring it to you."

The color came into Katherine's face.

"I had forgotten," she said. "Tell the man to come up."

After a slight scuffle a baize door swung back and a small, thick-set servant was dragged by a strong, long-haired collie, whom he endeavored to hold in bounds on a leather lead.

"Gently, lad, gently," he kept on saying; but the collie was determined to go on, whether he followed or not.

"This," said the man, panting and tugging at the lead, "is Mr. Errington's collie dawg, milady. 'E gave me orders to bring it to yer ladyship at once after he

sailed, with this note. Down, sir! down, sir!" and he held out an envelope, while with the other hand he strained the lead to pull the animal back.

Katherine patted the dog, who looked eagerly into her face with his amber eyes, panting with quivering tongue, and showing his pointed ivory teeth.

"What is his name?"

"His nime is Laddie," said the man. "Good dawg, good dawg," as he struggled again.

Katherine turned away and opened the note.

"I would ask you to be good to this poor lonely thing," it ran, "as you are good to every living creature. I dare not ask you to be kind to it because he has been my friend and companion; but will you keep him with you till I come back? And if I do not, may he stay with you and find that happiness which is the lot of all who are near you?"

She held the paper for a moment, and then, feeling that the eyes of the servant were watching her, she ordered him to loose the dog.

"He is to stay here," she said.

Presently an ominous growl from the other end of the hall betokened the presence of Nip, who resented the advent of the tawny stranger. The low growl was angrily responded to and a fight was imminent. Katherine hastily rang the bell, which was answered by the butler.

"Take Nip away," she said; "he is ill-tempered."

The old man looked aggrieved, but caught the dog by his collar and pulled him toward the door which led to the offices. Nip dragged at his collar and growled his remonstrance. His rough coat was standing up like wire, and as he passed into the lower regions he cast a reproachful look at Katherine, half pathetic, half angry.

The incident did not please her. She laid her hand on the restless collie's head, but the thought that Nip's banishment was her first act after her return to the solitary house was an unpleasant memory, which she tried to forget.

CHAPTER II

EVENING was setting in; the sky was leaden and the dust rose in little bustling circles. The wind caught the dirty paper on the pavement and drove it along the street, making a constant rustling sound. The dull court looked gloomier than usual. The children had left their play for a while; they had been screaming at their games, as only town-bred children scream, with that restless excitement which is characteristic of the fact that there is no proper vent for their energies; but a fight was taking place in an adjacent alley. A crowd had gathered, and nothing can equal the pleasure which the arrival of the policeman, and the subsequent separation, and the possible removal of the combatants to the nearest police cell, brings to the slum child.

In the window of a little parlor in the corner house the figure of a girl was sitting, looking out into the street. She sat motionless, her profile clearly drawn against the white panes, her hands folded in her lap; the droop of the head gave sadness to the outline. An open book lay beside her, but she had not turned the pages.

An older woman entered the room with a taper; she was about to light the gas, but the girl turned with an imploring gesture:

"Not now, Nanny, not now. Let me be in the dark a while longer."

"Yes, Miss Elizabeth, if you wish," said the servant. Then, with the affectionate familiarity of a trusted friend, she came across the room, and, laying her hand on the slight figure, she said: "Don't fret, dear; try to forget."

The flickering taper was still in her other hand, and shed fitful touches of light on her gray hair and pale complexion. The kindly, motherly face looked on the little dark head that was pressed against the window with quiet composure.

"Oh, Nanny!" said the girl, turning wearily toward her. "I can't help it; I do try to forget. I have no right to remember, but it's such a hard day." She rose as she spoke, and held out her slim hands with a gesture, partly helpless, partly of despair.

"Don't you fret, dearie; I wouldn't. Whatever 'appens will 'appen, and if 'e does come 'ome, I don't see as you'll be any happier, worse luck."

"You mustn't say that, you dear old thing. Don't let's talk of it. It's best just borne; but days like this make me feel how it all lives, and nothing, no, not all the work and all the needs of the people, can root it out."

"Time is a wonderful doctor," said the elder woman. "He comes and sort of smothers out things, and makes us forget, if we're patient. I'm sure, Miss Elizabeth, I've had sorrows as I felt I never could get over, but lor'! to-day I 'ardly thinks of them. When Simmons was took sudden, as I've often told you, and they brought him 'ome a corpse, and I 'elped wash 'im and put 'im in his coffin, I felt I never should get over it, but I did. Three months after I took in washin', and many's the time I felt a downright brute, I eat so 'earty, an' I slep' so well. And when I comed to your gran'ma, the first situation I ever took, and I 'eld you in my arms, I felt I never wanted nothing more in the world."

"Yes, Nanny, I know, I know," said Elizabeth, looking at her with the pity the young feel for the old, because they realize that the capacity for vivid happiness has gone, and, with the duller sensibility, suffering is less poignant.

A gust of wind swept over the court. The rain began

to fall. The children came shrieking back, and disappeared into their several dingy doorways like rabbits that seek their burrow. Yet still Elizabeth sat on. She was roused from her solitary watch, however, at last, by the slamming of the door, footsteps in the passage, a man's voice, cheerfully telling Nanny how wet it was, while he took off his dripping coat; and then the door opened, and a strong, cheerful voice said:

"Is anything wrong?"

The visitor stood in the doorway, unable to find his way into the dark room. Nanny hurried past him with a light, and soon the gas was burning. He was a man of medium height, powerfully built, with large head and massive forehead, and deep-set gray eyes. He had a short brown beard and very dark hair. There was an eager, anxious look in his face, and his eyes were bright and restless.

"Nothing wrong," said Elizabeth, still sitting by the window, half turning and holding out her hand, "only I was tired, and couldn't come to the meeting."

"You missed something," he said, throwing himself into an arm-chair and crossing his legs. "You would have thoroughly enjoyed it. Gessner was superb. I never heard him better; he absolutely demolished Blount and his miserable individualistic theories. I'm most awfully sorry you weren't there."

He went on talking in his eager way, as though the subject in which he was interested possessed him. He had no ears for anything else. Presently Elizabeth rose and took a low seat opposite to him, and wearily listened to his explanation of the lecturer's point of view.

"Yes, that was good," she said, when he paused; "but what will come of it all? It's the same thing over and over again. We all see it and know it, but everything goes on just the same. I'm tired of talk." He was

watching her now. "It seems to me that all this eternal talk is as if a doctor were perpetually lecturing a sick man on what health really is, while the poor patient can only pray for healing—healing, that is what we want, healing for this great hospital of a world," she said, clasping her hands tightly together. She looked at him as she spoke, and saw that his boots were muddy, which annoyed her, and then she felt angry with herself for noticing so insignificant a detail. "Oh, Michael," she continued, "I am so tired of it all; so tired that I sometimes feel I would rather not hear anything more about people who are suffering, since we can't help them."

"Betty," said the man quietly, "I know what you feel. You're not well to-night; you've been overdoing your strength, but you mustn't lose heart. It's only as some of us see the wrong, and try to right it, that we can awake the sleepers all round us. We have got to be content to be torch-bearers for a bit, and help people to find the right way, and they will find it. It takes a while to rouse them. Then they have to rub their eyes and find out where they are, and that is our moment to set them on the right road. You were always an optimist, Elizabeth."

"Yes," said Elizabeth, smiling sadly. "I remember old Mrs. Marner saying that she wasn't going to get low spirits any more. She had heard me say I was a hippopotamus, and she was going to try to be a hippopotamus too. But, Michael, I feel that somehow I am losing my likeness to the big, powerful beast."

Michael threw his head back and laughed, showing a row of strong white teeth.

"Take courage, little Hippo," he said; "all your strength is wanted by the feeble, who look to you in order to imitate whatever you are, and that must be always your best. No, Elizabeth, don't lose heart;

we have set ourselves to change the code by which the world is governed, at any rate this little bit of the western world to which we belong. Good God!" he said, sitting upright, "it's a splendid work. Fancy, if you could really show men that the commandment which rich men listen to with such complacency every week, 'Thou shalt not steal,' with a comfortable feeling that it does not apply to them, is the very one that they are breaking, in common with the tramp who sneaks a loaf, or the poacher who bags a rabbit; only that theirs is a crime black and hideous, whereas the other is often excused a thousand-fold by circumstances. The poor man is caught and put into prison; that doesn't prove his guilt. The other sits to condemn him on a magistrate's bench, or is made a baronet or a peer, and patted on the back as a valuable member of society; and all the while his slum dwellings are the breeding places of crime. But if he were to clear them he would lose income, and so, to benefit himself, he steals the health and happiness of men and women and little children. Most people never look on things as they really are, but are contented with what they seem. That is why the horrible, hideous hypocrisy of it all has so eaten into our national life."

He rose as he spoke and paced the room.

"Don't talk as if you were at a public meeting, Michael," said Elizabeth peevishly.

He stopped, standing in front of her; she was leaning back in her chair. He paid no heed to her fretful interruption; it was as though he had not heard it; he was too engrossed in his subject.

"You and I think, perhaps, we can do very little against the great tide of the lust of gain; but if we can only show the dastardly cowardice of living each for himself, and only rouse people from this stupor which is called 'content,' to realize the degradation to which they

have come, why, that is a divine mission, good enough for the best." He looked down at Elizabeth absently, and said, after a pause: "Yes, I know you suffer. Each has to walk the *via dolorosa*, which is the way of death, but it leads to resurrection. But you're tired. I won't weary you," he said, as he sat down again.

"There is a humble little detail I want to speak of," he added, drawing a well-worn book from his pocket. "You know young Joe Carter, who used to work at the flour mills. He's in the Militia, and he's gone to South Africa, bitten by this thirst for men's blood they call patriotism, and he's left that girl almost penniless. Trouble is, they weren't married, and there's a baby expected. It is a hideous lookout for her," he said, looking up with his eager, questioning eyes. "Great God! we call it Imperialism, this murder of another nation for land-grabbing; and with our usual hypocrisy, we talk of British honor. How much should we have thought of British honor if the country had no mines? We deserve to be beaten, and we shall get our reward some time or other."

"Michael," said Elizabeth, sitting upright, her hands tightly pressed together, "don't let us talk of that. The men who went felt it their duty, and they are willing to die for it. The war may be a criminal mistake, but it has called out splendid qualities in the men who have risked everything to go. I'll do what I can for the girl, and go to her to-morrow." And she leaned back again as though the effort to speak had tired her.

"Go to bed and get a long sleep," said Michael, rising. "It's the only medicine you need. Good-night!" and he held out a large, well-shaped hand in a protecting way.

Presently the shutting of the street door proclaimed that he had gone out into the night.

Elizabeth rose and went to the window; the blind

had not been drawn. The street was silent and desolate. Twice a church clock had given the time since the last passer-by staggered home through the rain to bed. A wet night chases most people home, and to-night the rain had been drenching when the public-houses turned their customers out. All down the street, doors were shut; blinds were drawn across closed windows, and though in most a light still burned, it was a dim light that told of smoking lamps turned low at bed-time.

The black pavement glistened in the light of the street lamps, bare and empty, except when, now and then, a stray cat picked its way carefully across the wet flags. But the rain was over now. A fresh wind was blowing back the heavy clouds that had hung over London all day, and high overhead a strip of sky showed between the roofs of the tall, dark houses, clear deep blue, with here and there a brilliant star.

The first breath of wind made Elizabeth open the window, and the strip of sky above held her there. After a hideous afternoon of fog and rain and mud—a day that made ugliness more ugly and misery more miserable —that strip of sky was like a sight of green fields; like a breath of air from the hills; like the sound of the sea. Blue sky and stars above the black houses; it seemed to her like the kind face of God looking down on the wretched street. And what a wretched street it was! The night hid its dirt and squalor now, and sleep hid its misery and pain. But daylight, she knew, would soon show it all once more. The quiet night would pass, and the stars be hid, and men, women and children would wake again in a few hours to hunger and sorrow and sin.

"Night brings us stars as sorrow shows us truth." Was it true? she thought. Night did not always bring us stars, or else we were so blinded by the flaring lights of the street that we could not see them; and some of us

were so shut in by this black wall of London that we never realized there was a sky above, never lifted our eyes beyond the wall of houses.

A slow, heavy footstep broke the silence. Somebody was coming down the street—somebody walking slowly and deliberately, for there was an interval of several seconds between the sound of each step. The sound came nearer, then a woman staggered past a lamp-post, and by the dim light of the lamp Elizabeth recognized the broad figure of Mrs. Green, the rag and bone lady.

She was talking to herself in a low, complaining tone, something about a farthing and the treachery of a blind man. She staggered on a little farther, then suddenly the footsteps ceased. Elizabeth leaned out of the window. Mrs. Green had slipped to the ground and was now lying on her back on the pavement; but she was still talking, still complaining of the blind man and her farthing. Evidently her fall had not interrupted her thoughts. But by-and-by the voice ceased; Elizabeth thought she must have fallen asleep, till her voice began again, this time clear and distinct:

"Gawd in heaven, look down on me!" Mrs. Green had seen the stars. "Here I lie, flat on my back, and Gawd in heaven, 'E sees me." Then her thoughts went back to her trouble. "The blind man 'e stole my farden, but Gawd in 'eaven will pity me."

For half an hour she talked to the strip of blue night sky. She told the stars the story of the farthing, of the blind man, and much of her history that Elizabeth knew to be true. She had just begun to pray when a policeman came by and offered to help her home to bed.

"Our Father, which art in 'eaven." Mrs. Green struggled to her knees. "'Allowed be Thy Nime," she began.

The policeman was kindly.

"Come now, Mrs. Green, come home, and you can say your prayers there." But Mrs. Green would not heed.

"Thy Nime—Thy Nime. Wot comes arter 'allowed be Thy Nime, Mister Copper?"

The policeman told her. Mrs. Green folded her hands like a child.

"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be do——, and arter Thy will be done?"

Again the policeman prompted. Petition by petition, he repeated the prayer for her, and Mrs. Green said it after him as a child might at its mother's knee.

"For ever and ever, Amen. Thank you, Mister Copper. 'Tain't often as I gets time to siy my prayers, but when I do, I likes to siy them right."

Then she allowed him to raise her to her feet and help her home. The sound of their footsteps died away, and again the street was quiet. But it was not for long. Soon two children came down the street and settled themselves on the doorstep beneath her window.

"My mover is rowing, so I came out," said one.

"I ain't been indoors to-night," said the other. "Farver and mover's bof boozed."

They crouched down out of sight and she heard no more for several minutes. Then suddenly one of the children began to sing. There was something almost uncanny in the child's voice, singing there in the dark night. Even more than the blue sky and brilliant stars, that shrill sweet voice brought into one hateful street a breath of a far-away beautiful world.

"There is a land of pure deloight
Where saints immorjul rine."

She too, then, had been looking at the stars. But she got no farther with her song.

"Don't!" said the other child quickly, in a voice that was sharp with pain. "It mikes me fink of the country, and I can't abear it, 'cause I'm 'ere."

The singing voice stopped, and again the street was quiet, but Elizabeth heard in the silence the sound of a child crying softly in the dark. She held her breath and listened. Then, quick as thought, she ran down the stairs, opened the door, and sat on the doorstep beside her. The dirty little head pressed against her shoulder, and a child's hand stole into hers, and she forgot the aching of her own heart.

CHAPTER III

Elizabeth Maynell had grown up in the conventional atmosphere of narrow surroundings. She had never known either of her parents, for her father, who had held a high position in the army in India, and had won the distinction of the Victoria Cross, died just before she was born. Her mother never recovered the blow, and her love for her little daughter had proved too frail a tie to keep her, and after a few sad months she followed her husband to that distant country, from which there is no leave of absence, as gladly as though she had been called to rejoin him in the Indian station.

The baby was left to the care of her grandmother and her aunt, and had known no other home. Her grandmother was an invalid, her aunt a conscientious, uninteresting woman, firmly persuaded that the real art of educating children was never to allow them to perceive that affection held any place in daily life. So little Elizabeth was reproved, punished and taught, but no glimpse was ever given her of any tenderness that made her childish presence welcome, or any caress that interpreted love.

There was one being, however, who opened the door of her heart with a magic key, who understood all her moods, to whom she came with all her troubles, and round whose neck she would throw her baby arms and cover the kind face with kisses. Martha, her nurse, was the very centre of the child's life. Granny might be stern and silent, auntie fidgety or unjust, but Nanny always knew all about it, sat by her when the nights were

dark, and held her hand till she slept, told her beautiful stories out of her head of majestic queens and pretty princesses, and splendid princes, of dragons and witches, of dwarfs and fairies. It was Nanny in whose arms she lay when the fever made her restless, or when she was wracked with whooping-cough. People might come and go, but Nanny was there, and Elizabeth was content. And Nanny loved the child as only a lonely woman can, who has no other channel to divert the current of her love. The pale face and dark eyes were to her the most beautiful in the world. She brushed and curled and tended the dark-brown hair as though it were some sacred trust. There were times when hatred positively possessed her, when she thought the child was unjustly treated, and almost wilfully misunderstood in her loveless home.

The day came at last when Elizabeth went to school. Martha looked thin and worn; she had not slept for nights. The dread of parting overshadowed her like a nightmare. Dry-eyed she would sit by Elizabeth's bed and tell her how happy a place school really was, of all she would do, the games she would play, and the dear little girls who would be her companions.

The torrents of tears she shed were unknown to Elizabeth, who thought that grown-up people never cried, that she alone enjoyed the doleful privilege of throwing herself sobbing into Nanny's arms, because she was only a little girl, while the strong voice comforted her and never trembled.

At last the parting came, and Elizabeth found that Nanny had been right. School was a paradise to the lonely girl, to whom the holidays seemed long and term-time short. She learned easily and well. The mistress was a woman of powerful intellect and keen interest. She was never content until she had moulded a girl's mind—

not merely taught conventional accomplishments. She saw in Elizabeth a strong nature with intense and passionate power of affection; she understood the restrictions of her home life, and she set out to widen the girl's sympathy, to soften her own trials by a deep understanding of the wrongs and troubles of others, and to turn her enthusiasm into channels which should bear her heart out to humanity at large.

The girl, who loved the elder woman, promptly responded, and was soon absorbed in the study of sociology and political economy, with the result that no more ardent reformer ever espoused the cause of the oppressed than she. Martha would listen, half frightened, half proud of her knowledge, by the hour, as she tried to show her where our social system fails, but Martha always ended the argument by returning to her original ideas.

"It's no use, Miss Elizabeth, God made some rich and some po'r; and we are distinctly told, and I see no reason for giving up my religion, that we've to order ourselves lowly and reverently to all our betters, and be content with that state of life to which it 'as pleased God to call us. There must be differences, and there is differences. Your grandmama and your aunt is born in another station from me, and so is you; only when your po'r ma died, I 'ad charge of you, and brought you through your teething, and loved you for your pretty ways and good 'eart, and your own dear sake. But Miss Elizabeth, dear, God has put the rich man in 'is castle, and the po'r man at his gate, and not all the learning in all the world is going to alter it, till we're all equal in 'eaven. Though where your dear grandma and aunt is going to sit I dunno, for they'll never like to be huddled up with servants, and even less respectable folk, as doesn't know their place as well as they; but God knows best, and 'E'll take care it comes out right.

Elizabeth was still a child when a strong influence, destined to mould her future, came into her life.

The Mill Farm was a long white building, set a little back from the high road. A small wooden bridge, painted white, crossed the stream, which had formerly worked the waterwheel now standing idle. A gate led to the house, and a brick path crossed the garden, gay with the flowers that bees love best. It was planted with no symmetry or scheme of color, but with splendid profusion, each flower loved for its own beauty, not for the sake of forming a geometrical design. The anemones, mignonette and carnations, and sweet-scented stocks, blue lupins and delphiniums, hollyhocks and michaelmas daisies, succeeded each other with the seasons, and roses bloomed there, it is said, longer and later than anywhere in the neighborhood. It was a garden that was loved and tended, and such fostering care is always to be recognized.

Mrs. Fane lived among her flowers. She was a tall, pale woman, with delicate health. The care of her garden, and the love of her son, were the joys of her existence.

Few people called at the Mill Farm. The general verdict was that they were odd, with strange ideas; in fact, it had been whispered that they were socialists—a word that conveyed little to the country people, but it had a dangerous sound, and it was always best to be on the safe side in making acquaintances. Moreover, Mrs. Fane rarely went to church, and her son never; so the rector, after a first visit, called no more. The owner of the Mill Farm was, however, wholly unaware that the question as to the desirability of admitting her into county circles had ever been discussed. She looked upon the remoteness of the place as one of its chief charms and the absence of visitors as a distinct gain.

She had been left a widow, after a life of unbroken happiness with one of the most promising scientists of his day, a man who was just rising to eminence, when the grasp of death held him back from fame. One boy was left, and his care and education became the passion of her life. Her means were very limited, but by the strictest economy she managed to give him an excellent education, and finally, by the aid of a scholarship, to send him to Cambridge. His success at the university was her reward, his subsequent career her one anxiety.

Michael Fane was a man who should make a mark. This was reiterated by tutors and friends; but, they told her constantly, the very strength of his character led him to take views on the questions in which he was interested which were often out of all proportion, and he was in danger of injuring his future by his uncompromising zeal.

At first the career of a clergyman appealed to him. It would bring him into contact with the people and open to wider spheres of influence. But as his opinions crystallized he felt that it was his love for the social side of the work which prompted his choice, and that he did not possess the faith that would make his religious teaching of any value, and he wrote to tell his mother that he could not conscientiously take Orders. This decision was a severe disappointment to her. She had hoped to hold her son in a settled life and definite work, but when once he determined to abandon the idea she never referred to it again, and left him free to make a new choice.

He finally decided to read for the bar, and to live in an East End settlement the while, where he could give his spare hours to social work. His mother left her London house, took the Mill Farm, and settled in the country.

To many who have been called to face the problem of cities, the illusion has remained that country places

are not infected by the horrible social sickness that infects the towns; but a little experience soon shows that the thatched, rose-covered cottages, and picturesque village streets are too often but whited sepulchres, hiding behind fair exteriors the plague of overcrowding, bad water, insanitary drainage, and other evils, which eat out the life of the slum dwellers.

Michael, during his visits to Ilbury, discovered all this, and much more. To his mind the hours of labor were out of all proportion to the pay. The conditions under which the cottages were held appeared to him little short of tyranny, and the question of the monopoly of land almost possessed him. He endeavored to instil into the work-people that spirit of revolt he believed could alone bring about reform; but he was met by apathy and a dogged determination to let things be, bred, he believed, of a deep-rooted fear of the power that could wrench from them what they held, and leave them stranded in far worse conditions.

The "neighboring gentry," as they were called, held his views in detestation, and looked on Michael Fane as a dangerous man, the more so as they recongized his undoubted ability. But happily his visits were short, and the business of his life kept him for the greater part in London, so the process of "undermining" the people, as they called it, was spasmodic.

He had, however, one eager disciple. Elizabeth, fresh from school, found in him a master, at whose feet she gladly sat; and Mrs. Fane, with her gentle, motherly ways, was to the girl the very embodiment of tender understanding and sympathetic womanhood.

Elizabeth was but a child when first she formed this strong friendship. Her frocks barely reached her ankles; her hair was braided in a thick long plait. She was still at the age when dress makes no appeal, and it was a

disgrace to own to any interest in personal appearance. But the sight of the little figure in a plain blue linen frock and shady straw hat coming up the pathway gave unmixed pleasure to the quiet woman, and was always welcomed by the young man who romped with her, and taught her, and watched her mental and physical development, with the eager interest he brought to everyone and everything he cared about.

Mrs. Maynell troubled herself little about her granddaughter's pursuits; and Miss Maynell thought it was very kind of Mrs. Fane to take any interest in a child like Elizabeth, for children were often troublesome and difficult to amuse. And so, during the holidays, the Mill Farm became to Elizabeth the one entirely happy spot; and later, when school days were over, it was for a time the centre of her life's interest.

There is a strange desire for change peculiar to the young; a desire which is almost incomprehensible to older people, for to those who are *sur le retour*, as the French so delicately call it, the absence of sorrow is almost synonymous with happiness. But to the young, monotony is misfortune.

Elizabeth was no exception. She would awake after dreamless sleep to perfect health; to the daily fortune she inherited with life, the sun that shone in the heavens, the birds that sang in the hedgerows, the devotion of Nanny, the love of her friends at the Mill Farm, the interest of her studies, the faithful affection of the village folk; and yet she often looked longingly away to the horizon, wondering, with the strange boldness of youth, what the future would bring. She was not discontented; it never occurred to her she was unhappy, only the world was wide, and the little corner in which she lived was very small. What key would open the gates of life and lead her out into its possibilities?

"If only something would happen," she used to say.

The uneventful days were, however, destined to be broken by the arrival of a guest at the great house of the village, known as Ilbury Hall, a dignified building designed in the sober period of William and Mary, square and substantial, with a fine roof and overhanging eaves, to which the architect had given a prodigal sweep, creating thereby an undefined beauty of outline. The square windows looked silently out on the wide stretch of park toward the west, twinkling at sunset like the eyes of some old veteran or past beauty recalling their former triumphs, and then growing gray and still again as the light faded.

Old Mr. Errington, the present owner of Ilbury, an estate of some ten thousand acres, of which his family had been possessed for generations, had spent his summers in London, attending to the affairs of his bank in the mornings, and spent his evenings in the House, where he usually slept while others managed the affairs of his country. But lately he had given up his seat in the House of Commons, and his bank saw him no more.

With tottering steps the old man was hastening toward the end of his long journey, but the devotion which had absorbed him through the years was the only thing which still remained strong and unbroken; and day after day he leaned over his study table, taking endless notes, and making innumerable little sums upon his blotting paper, with trembling hands caressing the list of his investments, or turning the pages of his bank pass-books, as an old book-lover might reverently turn the page of some priceless manuscript.

The house was bleak and dreary. The brown holland covers had not been removed for years. The great chandeliers hung in their drab shrouds from the ceiling. The carpets were faded and worn into little brown paths, where feet had most often passed.

Old Mrs. Errington, meek and deaf, sat in what was called the boudoir, a room made hideous by sham painted oak of a bilious yellow brown, and a flock paper, a very nightmare of red, green and gold, a legacy of the taste of the fifties. She often wished that her husband would allow her "to do up the room," and visions of white and gold papers with a border of pink roses came to her, but the flock paper still remained untouched. No one remembered any part of the house having been renovated or altered in the old banker's time.

At the end of this summer he decided to send for his nephew and his heir, Eric Errington. It had hurt his pride, that he had no son to succeed to his property and money, more than his heart. All the grief was reserved to the little lady who sat alone in the boudoir, who ordered his dinner for forty years, and now helped the trained nurse, as far as he allowed her, to take care of him.

Eric was in Scotland when he received his uncle's summons. He had rarely met the old man, and felt no compunction in answering that he would go to him as soon as the grouse-shooting was over. Having taken his fill of sport, when the birds got wild and the weather bad he put himself into the train, and early one morning found himself in a dog-cart, travelling through the misty lanes between dripping hedges to Ilbury Hall.

A turn in the road, and the gray stone piers of the gates rose gaunt and grim against the line of green grass which divided the entrance from the highway. The leopards, stiff and upright, mounted guard on either side, as they stood for two hundred years, and the iron gates, rusty with age, creaked slowly back as the man dismounted to open them. Somehow, as they shut again with slow, grating sound, Eric felt a new era was beginning; that, with the closing gates, new circumstances were opening round him.

The great avenue, dark with heavy foliage of the beech trees, already turning to gold, was dim and solemn; and then, as they emerged again into the light, the house lay stretched across the garden, gray and green and brown, the slate roof darkened with lichen, the massive chimneys, sharply drawn against the dull sky, and the faint line of smoke curling upward, the only visible sign of habitation.

It had never struck him as so fine before; and as he crossed the threshold he felt that there rose within him a new sense of pride which he had not known. This great inheritance was a goodly thing on which he had never really reckoned, but which was now almost within his reach.

"Mr. Errington is not down yet," said the butler, "but your breakfast is ready, sir."

He led the way across the slippery polished floor of the long hall into the low dark dining-room. Oak panels covered the walls, disfigured by varnish, but the full-length portraits by Reynolds and Romney gave a dignity that no defacing hand could destroy.

The butler, after supplying his wants, left the young man to his meal. The buhl clock ticked silently. It was the only sound that broke a silence which bid fair to rival the stillness that sends men demented on the ice fields in the great North-West. The hearth looked deserted, swept and garnished for the summer, with shining blackened grate, barred with forbidding paper.

The young man who sat there eating eggs and bacon presented a strange contrast, in his exuberant youth and strength, to the gloomy surroundings, with his clear blue eyes and bronzed cheeks, a slight fair moustache, and a thin firm line of mouth, short glossy hair and broad, well-made limbs; he was a picture of virile life in that silent, tomb-like house.

He finished his breakfast, stretched himself, and then, throwing open the window, he stepped out. Lighting a cigarette, he walked down the long terraced path upon which the lower windows opened, and paused for a moment when he came to the library, where he knew his uncle usually sat. He did not expect to find him there, as he heard he was not yet dressed; and he was startled to see a bent figure standing in the window, his eyes fixed intently on a gardener who was sweeping the golden leaves. The whitened lips moved slowly, and as the man worked a smile lit up the faded eyes, set in a network of wrinkles, and the trembling hands made continual motion, as though he were getting together a heap of scattered money.

"Shovel 'em up, shovel 'em up," murmured the old man continuously; and as the gardener swept, his bird-like claws grasped some invisible heap.

Eric stood and watched him for some seconds, until he saw the door of the room open and a nurse enter, evidently to tell him of his nephew's arrival. Then the smile faded, the old hands dropped, and he turned from the window.

A few moments later Eric was ushered into his uncle's presence. The nurse was still in the background. Mr. Errington sat at the writing-table. He turned slowly, and said:

"How d'ye do, Eric? Glad you could spare a day or two for us. Sport good? Too good to leave sooner"? he added, with a bitter little laugh.

He asked how many birds they had bagged? Were there plenty this year? Was the moor extensive? He remembered that years ago he had shot grouse in Yorkshire, but he added that he had taken few holidays. "Lucky the young men can get the time nowadays; I had no time for sport. I was grinding at my desk,

grinding day in day out, but I've made my pile," he said, as he put his trembling hands together as though he had something precious between them.

"I'm glad, uncle, to come; sorry I couldn't leave before. Two or three fellows and I had taken a moor, and I couldn't chuck it till the shooting was over."

The younger man looked uncomfortable and out of place.

"I've got a little business to go through with you," said the banker; "not that there's any hurry. I'm good for a long time, young man, I'll tell you that." And he looked at Eric under his shaggy white eyebrows as though he dared him to contradict it.

"Jolly glad," said Eric. "Of course, uncle, we needn't talk of that; you're game for years." But as he said the words he knew they were the lies the men tell to the old and the sick.

"Yes, yes, years," said the banker. "Things are bad now, but by gad! I've got investments it would puzzle a wiser head to beat; a combination as devilish ingenious as anything in the city."

Eric sat silent. He was not sensitive, but the scene jarred upon him, and he longed to be out in the open air, away from the ugly atmosphere of that room.

"I shall weary you now, uncle. I'll go out a bit, and come to you presently." He rose to go. The nurse followed him out.

"Mr. Errington's a little weak in his mind now and then," she said. "He has all sorts of fancies, as you have seen; he is always thinking he's at the bank, and that gold is being counted. Old people have all sorts of whims," she said, smiling a hard, frosty little smile. "But he's wonderfully strong."

Eric turned away, out into the garden, anything to be rid of the impression of that old man, chained to

his sordid life, and yet bound to set out on the long journey men take empty-handed. He tried to forget it, but the remembrance was strangely recurrent.

The next day was Sunday. The village church stood almost within the grounds. The little gray steeple was the only evidence to the family at Ilbury that there was any other life than the dull monotony of the present every-day existence, and the absorbing passion of making money.

Regularly every Sunday Mr. and Mrs. Errington had for years past been found in their accustomed places at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning, when they were at the Hall. The rector always spoke approvingly of the old banker. His subscriptions were not large, but they never varied. Every Sunday his half-a-crown was solemnly deposited in the plate, not because it had any relative proportion to his income, but because it was an appropriate coin. A shilling would be too little; eighteen pence was an unsatisfactory compromise. So years ago he had settled that half-a-crown was to be his Sunday offering, and he had stuck to his resolve, as indeed he did to everything he had once settled.

His regularity at morning service was also looked upon with clerical approval; and his almost fierce determination that whatever he went through in order to support the church should not be borne alone, which made him inexorable in his demands that every member of his household, and all his employees, should attend, likewise was much applauded.

"Such an excellent example," said the clergyman; and he was often quoted in clerical circles as one who earned for himself respect and admiration.

The family pew was an antiquarian curiosity; it occupied a gallery to itself under a carved canopy, enriched with the Errington family arms. Faded red

curtains screened the exalted worshippers from the vulgar gaze. But the old banker's devotions were seriously interfered with on account of the zealous watch he kept that none of his hirelings should be missing. The red curtains were drawn aside, the clang of the brass rings echoing noisily through the church, and the old head bent over the gallery while he scanned every pew. Occasionally an absentee was detected, and he would cross over to where old Mrs. Errington bowed meekly over her large prayer-book, and in a loud whisper would say:

"Maria, Mrs. Humphreys is not in church; and, so far as I can see, Henry is not there either. What does that mean? I'm damned if I will allow it!"

"My dear," whispered Mrs. Errington meekly, "it can't be helped. Mrs. Humphreys is just confined, and he is staying to look after her."

"No reason, no reason at all," in rather louder accents. "See he is here next Sunday; and she ought to be back Sunday after that. Lazy hounds! they'll always shirk if they can; but I'll have my orders attended to, by God! I will." And then he would cross to the pew and resume his devotions.

The arrival of Mr. Eric had been the topic of conversation through the week. People wondered what sort of man Mr. Errington's heir would be. The men on the estate discussed possibilities in low voices at their work, "For walls have ears," they said, and a man who ventured to criticise the reigning landlord would, as likely as not, lose his work and his cottage. So they would point meaningly to the Hall.

"Be the young squire cum?"

"Cum yesterday forenoon. A seed 'im droive in the great gates as a was cumin' 'ome ter breakfast; a loikly looking yung mon."

"Waal, toime'll show what 'e be loike, when we've buried the ole mon." And they fell to work again in silence, with the reserve natural to those who daily recognize the power another holds over their well-being.

In the village, where the women gathered for their weekly shopping, discretion was less apparent. Mrs. Williams had seen him when she was taking the servants' washing to the Hall.

"I was just a crossing the courtyard," she told her interested listeners, "when I seed a young mon cumin' acrass, taall and foine 'e was, and very 'andsome, to my oiye, at any rate. I made ma dooty to 'im, and 'e touched 'is cap for arl the world as if a'd bin a lady; quite the gen'leman 'e was."

"Different from 'is uncle," said a sour-looking old woman; "none'll be sorry when 'is toime cums, and the old squire's gone to meet 'is Judge. I siy, there'll be a surprise for 'im one day, and none too pleasant."

Mrs. Bitton's feelings were well known. She had a special grudge against the squire for sending her grandson to a reformatory for trapping rabbits on the waste piece of ground known as Scrubbs' Common.

"Waal, a 'ope as the young mon'll 'ave loong loife, and a good wife and a 'appy 'ome, an' do well by the po'r folks," said a rosy, round-faced woman, tucking a loaf of bread under her arm, and shouldering her heavy basket. "That's wot a 'ope."

In the tap-room the young man's arrival was fully discussed on Saturday night by the men who gathered there for a pipe and a glass of ale, as they sat round on the hard benches in the smoky atmosphere. Had anyone seen him? Yes, the man who drove him, dropped in, and gave much the same verdict—a gentleman, an' no mistake.

"As noice a man, I should judge, as ever sat be'ind

a 'orse. Tarked very affably aboot the ole mare as I was drivin'; asked 'ow many 'orses we kep'? A tole 'im straight outright. A says, 'orses we don't keep sir; crocks they is—isn't one on 'em's got fower legs. The pair 'as got aboot fower sound legs between 'em. 'E larfed 'earty, an' 'e says: 'Well, I daresay you're not arsked to bucket 'em aboot the country,' 'e says. Nice free young mon, I found 'im."

Then their talk wandered from the merits of the heir to favorite local grievances, and although comparisons are odious, they were freely drawn by men accustomed to the task, between old Mr. Errington and Lord Oxendon, who owned the adjoining estate. John Miller, the wheelright, and Stevens, the blacksmith, went over the old ground; they had travelled the same road some scores of times, but their audience did not weary.

"It's this 'ere ready mooney business as is our ruin," said the blacksmith, as he knocked his pipe against the edge of the seat. "If the old lord 'ad be'aved as the squoir does where would we arl a bin, d'ye think? Why, I've shod for the ole lord for twenty years, an' 'is bill 'as roon on mebbe sevin years at a toime. There's never bin noo countin' 'orse by 'orse, it's joost roon on, an' thin a sent in a statement, as the agint caals it, an' in coourse a toime the mooney's come, but this yer fidgety wiys wi' mounting bills, and what not, is ruin to 'ard workin' men. It's this gite yer mended, and it's this lock yer done, an' piy so mooch an' no more, 'ow's a mon ter mike a livin', a ast yer?"

"Yer right," said the wheelwright. "Nua'll joost giv' yer an instance o' what it means. His lardship sent 'is little brown cart ter me ter put new spokes in the wheels. 'E did some fower years ago. A did 'is job, an' a meets 'is lardship in the North Road, an 'e

stops, an' 'e says, 'Miller,' 'e says, 'yer did that job well,' 'e says. 'This yer little trap roons as well as ef it 'ad just come out o' the coach-builder's yeard.' 'E never arst for no bill ner nothink, an' o' course I weren't a-goin' ter trouble 'im, an' three years arter oi sent the agint the bill for six pun ten shillin's, an' a year arter that a got the mooney joost as right as can be. Th'ole squoire, 'e wants 'is ole dog-cart doon oup. There wasn't a spinter o' difference wot a done ter the two. A sent it baack to the staible; not twelve hours aterwards, doon cums Mr. McEwen joost as nasty as possible. 'Wher's yer bill?' A gives it to 'im, same as a give it to 'is lardship. Dooun 'e cums again, says the old squoire was a-tremblin' with rage. 'Take the spokes out agin, or tak' a pound.' Mean, a caal it, damned mean, takin' bread out o' folks' mouths. It's these mooney-makin' ways that's out o' place wi' a mon in 'is persition."

There was a chorus of assent. A few more instances of the difference between the two landowners, and then the talk fell to the prices at a neighboring sale, and wandered away from the old man and the new comer.

CHAPTER IV

On this particular Sunday every pew was filled. People came early to church with a pleasant feeling that something new was in store for them, and that all the week a topic of conversation and a source of conjecture would be provided.

The second pew of importance belonged to the Hon. Mrs. Maynell. It was of far more modest proportions than the squire's, and beyond the fact that it gained distinction by facing another way from the ordinary seats, it was on a level with them under the gallery near the pulpit. The old lady rarely attended church, and Miss Maynell usually occupied the seat alone; but today a fly had been ordered, and Mrs. Maynell, draped in a heavy black silk mantle and a bonnet with a tuft of black feathers, tottered on the arm of her daughter into church, a fact which gave added importance to the occasion.

Elizabeth had long ago purchased the privilege of sitting apart by the fact that she taught in the Sunday School, and on this particular Sunday she followed the children as usual, as they clattered into the side aisle and took their places, the girls, after hasty devotions, casting curious glances behind them, to catch a glimpse of the gallery where the great folk sat, then twisting and wriggling, brushing back their wiry hair, which had just been released from its prison of plaits or Hinde's curlers. The boys more placid, were chiefly concerned to pass bullseyes and humbugs to each other, and consume them, without detection. Great, therefore, was

the consternation when, with the opening sentences of the service, the red curtains were drawn back and Mr. and Mrs. Errington sat alone in their accustomed places. What could have happened?

Mrs. Hancock, the dressmaker, who held views which were represented by the publication called "The Protestants' Challenge," which she always placed on the table in her fitting-room, felt terrible misgivings. Could the young man be a Catholic or an atheist? It would be disastrous if it were so. She was almost certain she had heard something to his discredit, but she could not remember what it was or where she had heard it.

The young ladies from the Hill Farm, who had retrimmed their picture hats, realized that sense of flatness which usually accompanies disappointed anticipation. Even old Mrs. Maynell asked her daughter if young Mr. Errington was in church, as she could not see a third figure.

But disappointment was to give place to entire satisfaction, for during the Psalms a side door opened and a young man, dressed in a tweed suit, entered a pew at the end of the church, bowed his smooth, glossy head for a moment, and then stood up, tall and square, among the worshippers. A flutter ran through the congregation. He had gone into a free seat and was sitting next old Marty, the carrier's widow, a seat never occupied except by village folk. Eric, perfectly unconscious of any comment, opened no prayer-book, but put his hands in his pockets and looked round the church. It all seemed to him very primitive and humdrum.

"Good old souls, I dare say, browsing here like their own cattle, never seeing anyone or anything," he thought. Then there came before him the remembrance that some day they would be his dependents, and he the rich man who would hold the power of the place in his hands. What would he do? Of course he would be kind; he

wanted to be liked. He would keep hounds, and have big meets at the Hall. How much money would he want to settle his bills? What would hounds cost? Whereabouts could he build the kennels?

He sat down mechanically as the first lesson began. The clergyman was reading in a harsh voice the story of Jonah, the cowardly crew and the great fish. He began to look over the congregation again. Presently his attention was arrested by the figure of a girl wholly unlike the rest of the worshippers. She was dressed very simply. It would have been difficult to recall what she wore, but her clothes hung with easy grace, and the bend of the head showed the pretty points on the nape of the neck, from which grew the soft brown hair. He waited for the head to turn, interested to know whether the face was in keeping with the charming line of the white neck and of the willowy figure.

A fidgety child gave him his opportunity, and he saw an oval face and dark eyes, with a curiously appealing look, as Elizabeth half rose from her seat to rebuke the boy, and as she turned their eyes met. The light of the body is the eye. There is at times a curious sense of sudden recognition, not of any previous acquaintance, but of subtle affinity hard to define.

Elizabeth looked away at once. She was annoyed at having caught sight of Errington. She held very strong views as to the attitude of mind she wished to maintain in church. It was one of her chief reasons for desiring to leave the family pew. She wanted to feel alone, away from the associations of her perplexing life.

The careful observance as to the conduct of each member of a family, common in the Church of England, is unfortunate and embarrassing. In Roman Catholic countries devotion is not regarded as strange or priggish, but with us, if a girl kneels longer than is

customary the matter is gravely discussed by her elders, and she is supposed to be either morbid, or to desire to seek spiritual notoriety; and if a boy should show such proclivities, it would be considered abnormal.

Elizabeth tried hard to banish from her mind the remembrance of those questioning eyes; and after the service was over followed her charges down the aisle, determined to look in the opposite direction, although she felt Errington was watching her intently. The children had almost passed the place where he sat, when a boy, desirous of escaping as quickly as possible the restraint of the slow procession, dropped a prayer-book as he brushed past Errington's pew. The young man bent down quickly and picked it up. Then, waiting till Elizabeth passed, he rose and gave it to her, saying:

"One of your boys dropped this, I think."

She looked round. She would have given anything to have appeared indifferent, but the color came into her face; she took the book, and muttered her thanks, and left the church with a strong feeling of annoyance, quite disproportionate to the trifling incident.

"I'm sorry I had no top hat, uncle, so I could not go with you to church," said Eric at lunch.

The matter had been gravely discussed before church with Mrs. Errington, and it had been finally settled that the absence of regulation dress barred the entrance to the family pew. She was an undecided woman, never quite sure of anything, and when Eric consulted her she wavered.

"Dear Eric—I don't know—your dear uncle always does, and my brothers, when they come here. It's generally supposed—but still, you're only passing on your way to London—still, perhaps it's best—it might seem like disrespect to the church, or to your dear uncle—I'm sure I don't really know what to advise."

The outcome, however, was, as we have seen, that Eric risked neither Divine nor human displeasure, and worshipped in the free seats. He was anxious to ascertain Elizabeth's name, and yet for some reason he did not ask the question directly, but preferred to take a circuitous route.

"Who was the old lady in the pew?" he asked his aunt.

"Mrs. Maynell, the Hon. Mrs. Maynell, sister of Lord Oxenham," said Mrs. Errington, "and her daughter, Miss Maynell, was with her. She has a grand-daughter, a young girl who lives with them, the late Major Maynell's only child. They have brought her up, and have been very good to her."

"She was not in church?" he queried.

"Oh, yes, she was," said Mrs. Errington; "she—well, I don't know, I'm sure, young girls are so odd, everything is topsy-turvy nowadays. She sits with the school children, I'm sure I can't think why. When I was young my poor dear father would never have allowed it. Indeed, we never should have wished it. The schoolmistress, it seems to me, is paid—but I don't know—everything is so different."

So Eric gained the information he wanted, and spent the rest of the afternoon smoking cigarettes and wondering how he could arrange to see Elizabeth again. He lay on his back under one of the big cedar trees where the peacocks roosted. They were screaming in the afternoon sunshine; their harsh discordant voices were said to betoken rain, but the golden light shining through the dark branches of the big tree seemed to defy the omen.

He saw himself meeting Elizabeth in the fields, releasing her favorite dog from a trap, saving her from an infuriated cow. All manner of adventures passed

in review, and each time she met deliverance at his hands, for her dog or for herself, with the same straight, appealing glance which fascinated him in the morning. It worried him to be able to find no excuse for seeking her out or making her acquaintance. Mrs. Errington's tone did not imply intimacy with her grandmother.

At last he decided to go to evening service. He could not remember the Sunday when he had even contemplated two attendances at church, but custom did not deter him. He was not burdened with scruples as to his motives. He had a distinct object in going, and he announced his intention at tea.

The old man had gone to his room; he was tired, and would not leave it till dinner-time, his aunt told him. Evening church was at six. Was he going? She never went twice. His uncle thought once on Sunday was enough. Did he always go in the evening? The walk was very nice. She remembered, with a little sigh, liking evening church best years ago when she was a girl. She used to go through the cornfields on summer evenings in Surrey.

"My poor dear mother was very religious. It used to be very pleasant—but, dear me, it's a long time ago"; and the little pale, withered face looked sadder even than its wont.

At six o'clock Eric started across the park in the opposite direction to the church. A low red-brick building, almost buried among the trees, had been pointed out to him as Mrs. Maynell's house, and he walked leisurely toward it without any definite plan of action, trusting to luck to bring him some pleasing adventure.

The elms were reflecting the orange and brown lights of the sunset against the pale evening sky. The trees in the avenue cast long blue shadows across the yellow grass, and the stillness of an English Sunday was hold-

ing that country world in its beautiful spell. Now and then the distant bark of a dog broke the silence, but the quiet that succeeded the sound emphasized the peace. A few children stood near the gate that led into the lane. They had been picking blackberries. Their mouths and hands were stained with the purple juice. They looked with wide-eyed curiosity at Eric as he passed, whispered and giggled, and then the desultory child-mind asserted itself, and they fell to gathering blackberries again, and forgot what manner of man the stranger was.

The path to the manor-house lay across another field. A stile on the further side of the lane showed where the white line followed on over the green grass. Eric climbed the stile and continued on his way. What could he do to ensure his end? How could he manage to meet her? He did not wonder long for, suddenly, coming straight toward him out of the copse which bordered the field, he saw the slim supple figure of the girl who had so filled his mind since he first saw her seven hours ago. The realization of his hope made him start.

He had done his best to bring about this event, and now that his plan had so far succeeded he felt baffled to know what use he could make of his opportunity. He seemed at far off as ever from attaining his end.

At that moment the evening stillness was broken by a clash of rushing, swinging sound, for the church bells took possession of the peaceful hour, imperious, insistent. Elizabeth came nearer. She too had seen the figure slowly coming toward her, and had again felt strong self-contempt for the little flutter of excitement which the sight brought to her.

They were now close together. He noticed that in an ungloved hand she held her prayer-book, and that the hand was long and slim. He stood before

her on the narrow pathway and raised his cap. The inspiration came to him to ask her if he was on the right road to church. Truly, men are willing to be counted fools sometimes to gain an end, for the tower was behind him, and he knew it well.

Elizabeth looked at him gravely for a moment, and then the same strong feeling of comradeship which had taken hold of both for a moment in the morning possessed them again, and they looked at each other and laughed. That laugh was the death of conventionality, the merry mingling of minds which is the gateway of friendship.

"The church," said Elizabeth, "is there," pointing to the tower behind her. "Do you not hear the bells?"

"Are you going? Will you let me walk with you?"

"I suppose I ought to say I have not been introduced to you, like the man in the 'Bab Ballads.' But I am going to church, and as you seem to have a very poor instinct for locality, I will take you there, if you like."

"My name is Errington, and you are Miss Maynell, I know," said Eric. "That is introduction enough, isn't it? without the intervention of a third party!"

That evening after dinner, when wine and dessert were on the table, Eric casually mentioned the fact that he had met Elizabeth.

"I missed my way," he said, "and as I met Miss Maynell, I asked her the road to the church. She seems a nice girl. She was very kind in setting me straight."

His remark led to no response from his uncle or aunt, but the rector, who usually dined at the Hall on Sunday night, said:

"She is a good girl, but full of the most exaggerated present-day theories. It has always been a mystery to me how Mrs. Maynell, a lady of good birth, should allow her granddaughter to associate with people like the Fanes. Most extraordinarily undesirable, I should say."

"D'you mean those people who have come to the old Mill House?" said Mr. Errington, suddenly roused. "That Radical chap that goes ranting about, upsetting people, and stirring them up to ask more wages? A young blackguard, that's what he is. Mrs. Maynell must be mad if she lets that girl make friends like those. I'd like to catch him coming here! Why, I understand he held a meeting about the state of the cottages; said every laborer ought to have at least three bedrooms, and a drawing-room and a piano, I suppose! A man without a penny of his own to bless himself with telling landlords what they ought to do—it's unbearable. I'll tell you what it is——"

And then the old man repeated all he had said again, and lost the thread of his argument; the momentary fire had burned low and left him listless.

"Besides," said the rector, when the pause came, "they are not Church people, which is in itself objectionable."

"Damned dissenters! I was sure of it," muttered Mr. Errington.

The clergyman looked puzzled. He approved the sentiment, but deprecated the form of expression.

"Elizabeth seems a nice girl. I am sure it is difficult to know what to do," said Mrs. Errington, "such odd people call nowadays. When I was young my poor dear mother would have been shocked at the way in which all these newcomers are admitted into county society."

The rector cordially agreed as to the undesirability of the modern mixture of classes and creeds, and a desultory talk was kept up between him and Mrs. Errington until they left the dining-room to finish the evening in the inharmonious surroundings of her sitting-room.

The thought of Elizabeth's friendship with the young Radical was not agreeable to Eric. Why did she want to mix with cads like that? She was too good for such surroundings. He felt the gulf that existed between himself and such a bounder as this Fane. It seemed clearly a duty to deliver a nice girl from people like that. He felt no doubt as to his capability of training her taste, and showing her what a gentleman should be.

On her return home Elizabeth also determined to mention her meeting with Eric. Mrs. Maynell sat stiffly dispensing cocoa and cake. The Sunday evening meal at the Manor was informal. Who had preached? she asked, with a few more questions as to the congregation; and then Elizabeth said, with slightly heightened color:

"I met young Mr. Errington in the meadow, and he asked me the way to church, and I showed him the road."

"Good gracious!" said her aunt. "I hope he knew who you were. What did he take you for, I wonder, that he should speak to you without an introduction."

Elizabeth almost smiled when she remembered how this difficulty had been overcome.

"He knew my name," she said demurely, "and introduced himself."

"Twentieth century manners with a vengeance," sniffed her aunt.

When bed-time came, and Elizabeth was safe in her own room, with Nanny to undress her and tuck her up and kiss her good-night, her spirits were unusually exuberant.

"Guess, Nanny," she said, as she danced round the boarded floor which surrounded a small oasis of carpet, "guess who I've seen. The fairy prince, Nanny, and what's more," she said, stopping in front of her, "I've spoken to him. A real prince, handsome and good,

and very brave, for he made acquaintance without any introduction."

"Oh, Miss Elizabeth, whatever will your grandma say?" said Nanny; but in her romantic heart she thought that perhaps he too had found the enchanted princess.

The world never seemed so beautiful to Elizabeth as it was in those autumn days. The golden light shone through the beech trees, touching the deep brown carpet of leaves that lay on the green grass with wonderful pink and brown colors. The little evening mists rose faint and blue over the meadows, and the robins sang everywhere.

It was strange how often she met Eric, and how natural it was to tell him just which way she would go next day, and how naturally their walk led the same way and they went together. At first such meetings only meant an added interest to the afternoon, but soon her first waking thought reached out to that point in her day. It was the pivot on which all her other plans depended. The ordinary little annoyances of life no longer affected her, if only the afternoon would bring those hours of happy, indolent, delightful intercourse. She spent more time before her glass, retrimmed her summer hat and sat up far into the night to let down the hem of her dress. She thought it looked childish to wear it so short. She held herself better, and arranged her hair with care, and almost fancied now and then that she was nice-looking, and then, as she anxiously peered at herself in her very small mirror, she recollected all the wonderful people whom Eric had described to her, the celebrated beauties, whose photographs were sold in the London shops, and appeared in the picture papers, and she turned away, despising her own temerity, even to imagine that anyone in all the world could care how she looked or what she wore.

To Eric those walks had also become quite a pleasurable experience. He had at first been amused at the curious mixture of naiveté and knowledge which Elizabeth displayed. She had listened eagerly to his account of all the people he had met and known, names which were historical to her, but to him were friends and acquaintances. She had heard with interest his description of that great world of London which seemed so far away and so mysteriously brilliant. But what made her singularly interesting to him was the fact that whenever he talked about abstract questions, spoke with authority on the condition of the masses and their dependence on the classes, settled the vexed relations of the sexes in a sentence, or condemned a political party with wholesale opprobrium, he found that Elizabeth held strong views, not to be shaken by generalities. Here her mind was formed, her reasons ready, and while she listened patiently to his sweeping criticisms, he felt he influenced her but little.

He had from time to time endeavored to "draw her" as to her friendship with the Fanes, but on this subject she was singularly reticent, always loyal but never expansive. She instinctively felt that a gulf was fixed in her mind between these friends and himself which she was determined should not easily be bridged.

But when Eric talked of art and music Elizabeth was enthralled. He would describe Wagner's operas, explain wherein lay his stupendous power; demolish the idols she had hitherto adored, showing her how Mendelssohn and Handel became well-nigh intolerable to those who were held captive by this modern Titan. Then he would talk of Venice and of Rome, give her graphic pictures of Florentine art, tell her of the wonders of the Renaissance. Elizabeth would hang on his words. Her soul went out to this world of

beauty as a little grub rises from the quiet pool, expands its wings and soars into the summer air.

Eric could talk well, and he knew his power. He liked to watch her color come and go, and the pupils of her dark eyes dilate. She listened to him while he played on her imagination with a skilled hand. One evening he had left her at the crossway where their roads parted; he turned to watch her as she leisurely crossed the meadows. The picture of the straight figure in the sunlight pleased him, and he noticed her graceful strength, when in an instant his arm was roughly grasped, and he was violently hurled across the road.

A rushing sound, the toot of a horn, the blinding dust that rose round him, told him what had happened, and how narrow had been his escape. Eric looked round to find his deliverer. A squarely built bicyclist in dusty clothes, with a flannel shirt, came toward him.

"I was only just in time," he said, laughing.

"You risked getting yourself crushed," said Eric. "I'm awfully obliged to you. I think you saved my life."

"Oh, that's all right," said the other man. "It doesn't do to wool-gather in the country lanes; these rushing monsters are down on you in a moment."

Eric liked the voice; it was strong and kind. He loitered a little, and talked about the state of the roads, the various hills, the best machines, as the stranger walked beside him, wheeling his bicycle. At the lodge gate his companion stopped and said:

"Good evening. This is your road; mine lies farther on across the stream. I live at the Mill Farm, and my name is Fane. I heard you were in these parts, but I have been away for some weeks and only just returned. My mother will be glad to see you, if ever you care to come our way."

So this was Fane, thought Eric, as he walked toward the Hall, the man Elizabeth knows and won't talk about. He felt it was good his life had been spared; he ought to be grateful, but he almost wished that he did not owe it to this man.

"Anyhow, the fellow is a gentleman," he admitted grudgingly.

Michael told the incident to Elizabeth and laughed over his exploit.

"I saved the skin of the heir of Ilbury," he said, "but I shall hope at a future time to help divide his inheritance."

He was astonished that she did not seem amused, and made but little response. Elizabeth asked if Errington was hurt, and then appeared to take no further interest, and so the matter was referred to no more.

CHAPTER V

Old Mr. Errington had sent for his nephew for a long business conference. Eric was puzzled to know what had resulted from the interview. His uncle had told him little or nothing, beyond the generalities which he already knew, the acreage of the estate, his views on farming and managing land, his dislike of certain innovations which were being introduced by modern farmers, his particular desire to give no rights-of-way through the park, and the necessity of closing such roads to the public in order to destroy any future claim which might be set up. But when he left the old man's rooms he was no wiser as to any details of his uncle's property than when he arrived. The only piece of information he had gained was that his uncle had investments in a group of companies, called the Star, which he appeared to think a good thing, but how much money he had invested, or what his other securities were, he had not heard.

The interview over, all excuse for prolonging his stay at the Hall was at an end, and his departure was fixed for the following day. He had won golden opinions from his aunt, who continually repeated that it was really delightful to find a young man so willing to settle into their ways, requiring nothing but their society, and rejoicing in the quiet life at Ilbury.

On that last afternoon Eric met Elizabeth in the park, by a stream that ran through a long narrow valley. The air was very still and the water tinkled over the stones in the bed of the brook with gentle monotony.

From time to time a leaf fell with a little flutter, but it was an autumn day when the world seemed to hold its breath, as though anxious to delay the change which should strip it of its beauty.

They sat together on a fallen tree, and both seemed somewhat embarrassed. Eric because he felt half inclined to induce Elizabeth to tell him how large a place he held in her heart, and yet decided to refrain from committing himself; Elizabeth because she feared lest her voice might tremble when she talked of the time that was coming, and that thus she might unduly show how she dreaded the parting which loomed large on the morrow. So they talked of every conceivable subject which had but little interest for either, and Elizabeth was unnaturally gay, and laughed on the most trifling provocation.

"When shall we two meet again?" said Eric. "You certainly have made my stay here not only bearable but delightful. What should I have done, shut up with those two old mummies, if I had not been able to talk to you?"

The color came into Elizabeth's face.

"I don't know," she said. "I am afraid if you had left you would have suffered for your rebellion later on; but now, at any rate, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your duty for years to come." She poked a little hole in the grass with her umbrella, and did not look up.

"Oh, dear, no," said Eric; "it's only to last a very short time. I have promised to be back at Christmas."

Elizabeth's heart gave such a thump that she felt he must almost have heard it. She looked up quickly, and then, trying to appear indifferent, she said:

"Two months hence! Why, that is no time!" Then, as the full force of the news grew upon her, in the exuberance of her pleasure she forgot for a moment her supposed unconcern, and cried gayly: "Ten Sundays;

sixty more dinners." She went on calculating. "A hundred and thirty breakfasts and teas, and you will be back again." She laughed, and the remembrance of their first meeting came so vividly before him that he almost held out his arms to claim her then and there.

"Will the time seem so dull?" asked Eric.

"It's all very well for you," she replied. "You will go back to a good time and jolly friends, and you will see beautiful things, and hear splendid music; but I shall go on and on and on, all my life, till I look like Aunt Harriet." She felt she had committed herself, that he might misinterpret her meaning, and added: "And yet I am absolutely happy, and I want to stay here all my life. It is a beautiful place; the best in the world. I should hate London, and going out and seeing a lot of strange people."

"Would you not like to see Venice and Rome and Paris?"

Oh, no, I am happy just as I am. I want nothing. I love the village; and the Fanes are so good to me. They are always glad to have me at the Mill, and they are dear people."

Once more the strong desire came to Eric to place himself for ever in a position where equality could be no longer possible with this other friend. But again he prudently refrained.

"I called on them," he said, "to thank Fane for having warned me of the motor. Good, commonplace people, I should imagine."

"Commonplace?" said Elizabeth. "That's the last word you can use. Why, Michael took a double first!"

"I don't care if he took a treble first," said Eric. "They are commonplace. I could find you thousands of good, cultivated, enthusiastic people just like them; excellent and thoroughly middle-class."

"I daresay you could," said Elizabeth. "They are

my friends, so I belong to the middle-class; we have the same ways and ideas, that is why, I suppose, they appeal to me."

"Nonsense!" said Eric. "You do not belong to them. The spirit of bourgeoisie is the most subtle thing in the world—like a smell. I have tried again and again to define it, but it's entirely elusive."

"I defy you to know anything about them," said Elizabeth. "In one afternoon you cannot possibly classify people."

"Mrs. Fane put milk into the cups before the tea," said Eric—"that's a symptom; and she had curled up bread and butter—that's another."

"Well, that is delicate diagnosis," said Elizabeth; "but she had no teapot cosy."

"No. But believe me, Miss Maynell, they are. It's wonderfully middle-class to be so insistent about things that really don't matter. It was in very bad taste to try and get me to speak to my uncle about water for the cottages. Those are things to talk about with agents, not with your acquaintances."

Elizabeth did not appear keen to continue the argument, and by-and-by the sun was low and red on the horizon, and dipped behind the hanging woods which outlined the hill, and a cold gray mist began to gather. Elizabeth felt it was no use to delay, and she had best be the first to rise. So she got up, and said, with an air of exaggerated indifference:

"It is late. I must be walking homeward."

He sauntered down the road with her, where they had so often walked, and came to the crossways, where they always parted.

"I shall let you know directly I get back," he said.

She held out her hand; he took it, held it for a moment, and then both went their own way.

"Two long, long months. How I lied when I said I was happy," thought Elizabeth. "If I knew he was safe every day, and that he missed me a little, I should not mind the dreary time so much. But the horrible silence will be unendurable!"

Next day Eric went to London. He thought of Elizabeth all the way up in the train, remembered certain turns of her head and little inflections of her voice. It pleased him to lie back and think of her, while he smoked a cigarette and fancied what she was doing, and where she was walking, and how sad she must be.

When he arrived at Paddington he called a hansom cab and drove to his club. It was nearly three months since he had been in London, for he had left for the north a little before the twelfth. How jolly it looks, he thought, as the familiar streets greeted him with their various associations. He ran up the club steps. Several letters and telegrams were waiting for him, some bills which he hastily tore up, and three invitations. Lady Hornden and her daughter were in town—would he dine and do a play? Yes, certainly. Mrs. Rodney had a play party and supper afterward. Yes, she was always good company. So he telegraphed to Lady Hornden and wrote to Mrs. Rodney. He went into the smoking-room, lit a cigar and took up a paper. The image of Elizabeth seemed less vivid, as though the sharp outlines of the drawing had been somewhat effaced by other hands.

The dull November days seemed dark and long. The first weeks after Eric's departure appeared interminable to Elizabeth. When first she walked the familiar ways it seemed as though the emptiness was unendurable. Her whole heart cried out against the solitude. She walked through the desolate valley in the park; she stood before the fallen tree where they had sat together, and the hunger for the absent was almost physical pain.

If only some news of him would come to her, some token that he still remembered.

The thought of the many more attractive women who surrounded him became intolerable. She was a prey to jealousy of unknown rivals, whose form and features her imagination materialized. She thought of him all the day long; she prayed for him fervently by her little bedside at night; but to no human being did she speak his name, but locked away her sorrow and her hope. For hope she certainly had. He said he would come back. He had held her hand and looked into her eyes. Did not men look like that when they loved? Then the hot color would come into her face and she would feel that even the thought was presumptuous.

She spent less time at the Mill Farm. Mrs. Fane felt, with the intuition of a sensitive mind, that something had changed the child into a woman. What was the subtle difference it would be hard to define. She was absent-minded often, and seemed scarcely to heed the little interests which had been so absorbing to her but a few months ago. There was an aloofness about her which, for the first time, betokened the possibility of there being regions of mind into which her friends could not penetrate; locked gates which even the hand of friendship might not open.

When Michael came from London he too found her reserved. She still listened to and laughed at all he had to tell her, was interested in his news, but had nothing to tell him in return. He questioned his mother about her. Was Elizabeth changed? he asked. What had happened? Was she unhappy? But the wise woman, who had come to no conclusions, answered that Elizabeth was growing up; girls changed as they got older, and the transition period was often difficult.

CHAPTER VI

CHRISTMAS came at last. There is a wonderful similarity in anniversaries; they are like members of one family who have a strong resemblance to one another, and if some event comes to break the chain which binds them to each other, it brings to us a sort of dismay, as though the links of life were unduly disarranged.

To many the happiness of Christmas consists in its beautiful monotony, the family gatherings which have taken place with unbroken regularity, the little incidents whose very charm lies in their recurrence, the small surprises, the shrill voices of children singing the same old words to the well-known tune, the return to old home ways. All these mean Christmas to hundreds of men and women; and even if the season brings no vivid happiness, no special touch-point with other lives dear to us by ties of friendship or of kin, there is a sweet monotony in the little round of duties and of pleasure, which is intimately connected in our minds with this festival which binds humanity to God.

To Elizabeth Christmas had never brought the joy of a family re-united, but it had always been a time of quiet pleasure. The very fact that everything ever since she could remember had always been the same was in itself a joy she had begun to appreciate. To-night she stood beside the kitchen fire and watched Nanny making the festive puddings. Elizabeth imagined that she was taking her share of the labor, but Nanny, with her sleeves tucked up and her face glowing from exertion, would have told a different tale.

"Reach me that packet of cinnamon, dear," she said. Elizabeth went to the dresser and gave her a small brown paper bag.

"Bless your soul!" said Nanny hastily. "It's cloves you've given me. Very odd how you seem to 'ave lost your memory. I can't make it out. I stoned all them currants over again as you did yesterday, but bless you, dear, I was glad for to do it."

Nanny scarcely looked up. Elizabeth seemed troubled.

"Do I forget?" she said. "Nanny, I don't think so," and she gazed into the fire again and kept silence. By-and-by she asked, with magnificent indifference: "Are they having any party at the Hall this Christmas?"

"Party?" panted Nanny, turning the heavy substance with a slap in her basin. "What company do they ever keep? Not so much as the rich man in the Gospels, for they don't even let the poor man eat the crumbs as fall from their table. The squire, 'e'd 'ave 'em swep' up and kept for the servants' dinner."

"Of course I didn't suppose they would have a party; they're too old," said Elizabeth; "only I thought perhaps some of their relations might come."

"I b'lieve I did 'ear as the young squire was a-coming," said Nanny, "but whether it was before or after Christmas I couldn't say."

She paused in her work and looked up. There was a moment's silence. Then, as if a new idea had dawned upon her, she wiped her hands on her apron and went across the kitchen and stood by Elizabeth.

"Honey," she said gently, "I know who you've been a-thinking about; but don't let your heart go out to 'im afore 'e's told you that he has given you 'is already, or else there'll be trouble. I'm afraid of these fine gentlemen a-comin' down 'ere, and it's 'Won't you have a walk 'ere?' and 'Will you come a-boating there?'

and then go off and leave nothin' be'ind but sore hearts and long thoughts. Oh, dear! don't you be a-giving him what 'e 'asn't given you, dear Miss Elizabeth, don't you!"

And she put her kind hand on the girl's arm. Elizabeth half turned.

"Nanny," she said, "I don't; I don't. I am not giving anything he is not ready to give me back in return." But she said the words with the misgiving that came almost as a prophecy. Nanny returned to her pudding in silence.

Later Elizabeth was sitting in her own little bedroom, the one place which was all her own. It was bare in its frugal simplicity. The narrow bed, the worn furniture, the white walls, hung with every kind of picture and photographs, collected through the years, the tiny dressing-table with its common looking-glass, were all dear to the girl's heart.

To-night she had cleared the table, and by the light of a solitary candle she was tying up small bundles and writing the names of those for whom they were destined. There were the servant girls, Mary and Emma, a blue and pink bow for each—Elizabeth held them by turns against her neck to judge how they would look, and then packed them in neat little parcels—a new pipe for the gardener; a penny whistle for the eldest boy; a woolly bird for the baby. Each tiny bundle was laid on the bed.

Then Elizabeth opened a small cardboard box and held a little gold brooch up to the light with a look of real pride—her present for Nanny. How surprised she would be! She would wonder how on earth she had got anything so grand. She would never guess that Michael had brought it from London, or the many directions Elizabeth had given him with that marked advertisement in the "Queen" newspaper. The brooch was replaced in its pink cotton wool, tied up and addressed

"For my darling Nanny." Then with a sigh she took up a little volume of daily readings and inscribed her aunt's name "from her affectionate niece." A small Shetland shawl for her grandmother, and only two more presents remained to be packed, one a cheap edition of Epictetus. She opened the first page, held her pen and hesitated, why she hardly knew, then slowly wrote: "For M. F., from E. M." She had never written the inscription in any of her yearly gifts in that form, but it was the fittest, so it now seemed to her. "To my darling Mrs. Fane," she wrote in the "Gardeners' Almanack," which was the last present, wrapped both together and directed them to the Mill Farm. The milkman would take them in the morning. Then she sat still and thought.

The happiness of the occupation had changed the current of her ideas. She was easily lifted from depression, and quickly responded to passing pleasure. If her occupation was congenial, trouble might lie deep down in her heart, but the current of life would flow over it smoothly, and even joyously. She had the rare faculty of living in the moment and of enjoying what the hour might bring, which kept her mind supple, and gave continued vigor to hope.

By-and-by she rose and began to tidy her little room and lay her parcels in a neat row. Then she took out her best hat and brushed it carefully, looked out a pair of new gloves, examined the safety of the buttons with unusual anxiety, and finally took up her Bible and began to look over a Christmas lesson for the children.

Presently the still air was filled with the sound of bells. She opened the window and looked up at the stars, and the thought came to her as she looked out into the night that these were the same stars that had shone over the Bethlehem stable. She put her hands together and knelt down. No words came, only she prayed that she

might meet Eric, and that he might love her—if it was God's will, she added; but her submission was not very real, for if she could have coerced the power that holds our lives, assuredly she would have done so.

On Christmas Day three figures sat in the Erringtons' pew, and Elizabeth returned from church in exuberant spirits. In the afternoon she went, as usual, to the Mill Farm, by an unusually circuitous route, but to no purpose. The day was bitterly cold, and toward evening, when she returned, the snow began to fall.

Never had any hours seemed so long as that Christmas night, so anxiously did Elizabeth desire the morrow. The next day saw a white world, every twig adorned with a diamond parure, every roof outlined in pearly white against a sapphire sky. People murmured platitudes about an old-fashioned Christmas, but not even Miss Maynell's remark that "snow made the country look vulgar, like a common Christmas card," could mar Elizabeth's joy in the wonderful exhilaration of the day.

Soon after luncheon she dressed with unusual care and started for the yew walk, a long line of evergreen trees which united the broad undulating sweep of park with the bare hills in the open country. What inspiration led her to this place she did not know. The branches of the yew trees looked almost black, bearing their snow burden, but the sombre coloring was a relief from the dazzling whiteness of the road. The birds hopped before her as she walked, tamed by the scarcity of food. The road was long and lay between the trees like some garden walk bordered with formal hedge; and yet so winding was it in places that you could not tell what the next bend would reveal. Elizabeth walked quickly, and as she turned the first sharp corner she saw within a hundred yards the man whose presence she so desired.

How many thousand times during the last two months

had fancy painted just this moment; and yet when it had come she almost dreaded the meeting. Would her dreams be all dispelled? Would the reality bring pain or joy? Never did these twin spirits seem so near together.

Eric saw her at the same moment as he came leisurely along with his gun on his shoulder. He had been out for a day's shooting, "for the pot," as he called this solitary sport. The past months had somewhat dulled the eagerness of his desire to meet Elizabeth, but on Christmas Day as he watched her in church the eager longing to be near her again possessed him, and the hope that he might meet her had been in his mind all day. And now the sight of the slight figure, the brilliant color, and the strangely appealing face, brought back with a rush those feelings the intensity of which he had almost forgotten.

They were shaking hands with all the formalities and little deceptions used by those who dare not put their real feelings into words. Then they turned and walked together, talking of weather and like platitudes.

"What have you been doing since I left?" said Eric.

"Oh, vegetating quite happily," said Elizabeth, "each day the same as the last; but monotony is healthy."

"Did you think about our walks sometimes?" he said.

"Sometimes," said Elizabeth, and she smiled.

He could not understand why she did not expand as much as when they were last together. It vexed him that she should seem more reticent, and her restraint urged him to be more demonstrative himself.

"I have often thought of them," he said, "the yellow lights and the brown leaves. What golden days they were!"

"Yes, they were beautiful," said Elizabeth, but too demurely to please Eric.

He told her of his visits, of the people he had met, of the pictures he had seen and the music he had heard. She responded sympathetically. By-and-by the happiness which had been pent up began to melt like a frozen river in spring. Her laughter rippled out and joyousness possessed her. Eric was exultant. He told her of some new plans which he intended to follow up, of the possibilities of producing music which had not yet been heard in this country. He described to her a cantata, written by a Pole, unknown as yet in England. The music expressed the great problem of life, he said. He hummed the score and then explained to her where the theme changed, the mingling of sorrow and of pain, how the exuberance died out, giving place to the sorrowful wail of the lonely.

They paused. She stood and listened. The white world was still. Hardly a blade of grass stirred. Only the sound of Eric's voice broke the silence as he sang softly the minor air. Elizabeth looked up at him. The remembrance of the long, lonely days seemed to be interpreted by the song. Her eyes filled with tears, great drops that did not flow, but remained large and bright, as in the eyes of a child.

A flood of pity swept over Eric. The exhilaration of the crisp, clear air was like wine in his veins; the face, so delicate and pitiful, looked up to his. A desire to protect this tender thing was overmastering, and without a word he bent and kissed her.

Elizabeth was for a moment speechless. Were the gates of heaven thrown open? Had she only to pass in to be happy for ever and ever? The next moment her face was hidden and she was crying quietly in his arms.

"My little girl," whispered Eric, "have you missed me? Have the days seemed long?"

"Days?" said Elizabeth, raising her face and smiling through her tears. "They were as the days in Genesis, which we are told mean years without end. But why does anything matter now? Oh, I love you; I love you; and you love me."

It was the old story, told ten thousand times—told by the Ægean Sea, when the loves of men and gods mingled in far-off days—told in stately palace gardens beneath dark cypress trees under Italian skies, and echoed in humble corners of the earth, in lanes and hedgerows and mean streets.

"When did you first know you loved me?" he asked, as they went through the foolish catechism which expounds the creed of love in all times and places and languages.

"When first I saw you." And then each told the other of their hopes and fears and joys.

Then they parted. As Eric held her hand, he said: "Elizabeth, I have one thing to ask you. Don't tell anyone of this just yet. You see, my uncle is very old, and I have to go softly."

A little shadow came over Elizabeth's face.

"Oh, Eric, it is such a big thing to keep secret," she said. "How can I? Would it be right?"

"Yes, because I tell you," he said, taking her hand; "and you had better begin to practise obedience now, for you will have to do so very soon."

"Well, my lord and master," said Elizabeth, "take all the responsibility always and for ever." And she looked at him with happy, trustful eyes.

CHAPTER VII

ERIC turned into the long avenue and walked slowly toward the Hall. His mind was still confused with conflicting emotions. He had gone further than he intended, and had sealed his fate with a rashness he hardly regretted, so strongly had Elizabeth stirred his affections. The touch of her little hand, the soft supple figure he had held in his arms, were still vivid sensations; and the pleasure of the experience triumphed over the prudence he had prescribed.

"She is really devoted to me," he thought, "and a beautiful, lovable woman."

Then he caught sight of the long gray house as he had seen it three months ago. It would be his home and hers. They would live here in dignified prosperity. The children—his children—would play in the gardens and run about the corridors. Elizabeth would sit at the head of his table and entertain his guests. What impression would she make on his friends? He ran over a list of people and tried to imagine their comments. She might never be exactly a "smart woman," but she was refined and cultivated and captivating. She would dress well, in a style peculiarly her own. Of course she would drop ridiculous political ideas, derived from association with people like the Fanes.

Here he hesitated a moment, and the sense came to him that Elizabeth would never allow herself to be coerced.

"I shall have to manage her gently," he thought, "but her love for me will overcome such little obstacles."

And so with his mind full of the future he walked up the broad gravel drive toward the front door. He was surprised to see Wilkins, the butler, coming out from the house to meet him.

Why was he waiting? Was he late? The man's hands hung down by his side. He took short steps with a little swinging walk, as though he were announcing a visitor. As he came nearer Eric saw that his face looked unusually grave and that he made no return to the smile with which he greeted him.

"Mr. Errington," he said, "I have some news, very serious news, for you. You must prepare for a sad blow, sir. The old squire ——"

"Ill?" said Errington, stopping short.

"Worse than that," said Wilkins. "He's been took, Mr. Errington, took quite sudden, sir, sittin' at his libr'y table. It was 'alf past two, Mr. Errington, as I should say a quarter to three, as I went in to see to his fire. The old gentleman seemed quite comfortable. He was doing of his accounts. I 'eard 'im reckoning to 'imself. And just before tea time Nurse Jones went with 'is tonic as 'e always takes in the afternoon—a tablespoonful of brandy, sir, and some ginger—and when she opened the door she saw your poor old uncle a-lying all crouched up of a heap. He seemed 'ardly to know her. But she went up to him and roused him up a bit, and 'e says to 'er: 'Send for Mr. McEwen,' 'e says, 'I want to sell out some stock;' and then 'e says something about the stars, delirious like, I should judge, as the window curtains had been drawn quite a while; and 'e falls back quite dead, 'e did, sir."

Eric held his breath. At first he felt almost stunned by the suddenness of the event, which he had learned to regard as distant. Then there came a great rushing sense of exhilaration. Were all the difficulties gone?

Was he now a man of position and of fortune? In a moment he thought of himself with added importance.

He had indeed bestowed a great gift on Elizabeth now that with his own hand he could set the door of his home open to receive her. He kept a firm hold on his feelings, and, after a pause, he asked in subdued tones about his aunt. His words seemed to him to have gathered weight as he spoke of the terrible shock his uncle's death must have caused.

"Yes, Mr. Eric," said Wilkins, "she's terrible overcome, she is. We was obliged to break it to her afore you come back, sir, as we was afraid she might 'ave gone in to the corpse. She looked sort of frightened, and then she cried quite gentle, and nurse, she put 'er to bed, and that's where she is now, poor lady. She said she was sorry 'e'd gone off 'is 'ead, otherwise she should have sent for the rector to pray to 'im; but of course the Lord's ways isn't ours," said the butler, as though he might have improved upon them considerably if he were given a chance.

Eric walked across the hall, and then he paused. What ought he to do? He felt undecided. What was the right thing? Ought he to go straight to the library? He shrank from the thought. He had seen dead people very often; but somehow he could hardly endure to see this man whose place he was so soon to take, but he was particularly desirous of doing the right thing. Wilkins solved the problem.

"I wouldn't go in now, Mr. Eric—Mr. Errington, I beg pardon—but nurse is a-getting the poor thing ready for us to take 'im upstairs after the doctor's been."

The doctor; that was a great relief. Yes, that would be someone to speak to. It would be a blessing to have a definite duty to fulfil. It was clearly his part to see all those who came, and make all arrangements.

Wilkins began to draw down the blinds. He moved noiselessly from window to window, and reminded him, as the grating sound of the rollers attracted his attention, that when they were drawn up again the house would be his own.

"Please sir," said the maid, coming quickly toward him, "Mrs. Errington would like to see you, sir."

He turned to follow her up the shallow staircase, with a sense of discomfort at the idea of finding himself in the presence of grief, and a guilty feeling that what brought her pain had brought him all that he desired.

The room was nearly dark; the fire flickered on the ceiling in little patches of light, and at first he could not understand the geography of the furniture. But when his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness he saw the mahogany four-post bedstead, and, buried among the pillows, the little figure which seemed to have grown even smaller since he had seen her in the morning.

"Eric, dear," she whispered, as he bent down, "you know it all. Your dear uncle—we were married forty years—so sudden, not a word, only he said, 'I'm going to see into things, Matilda. I don't want to be disturbed.' So I did not go near him. He was a just man always—saw everything was right. Oh, dear, I wish—I think, if I could have had a word—but it's best perhaps—only we were together for a long time," and she turned her head and cried softly. "I wish I could have been more of a comfort, but I'm not very clever, and he had such a grasp."

"My dear aunt," said Eric lamely, "it's certainly awfully sudden, but really a mercy for him. A long illness is such a trial."

He hardly knew what he said. His voice sounded to him harsh and grating, but she took his hand and looked up with grateful eyes.

"Yes, you're so right. He had such a spirit, an illness would have been almost unbearable to him."

"Is there anything you would wish?" said Eric. "Arrangements, or anything?"

Mrs. Errington looked perplexed, as though questions tried her.

"You can do everything far better, of course—all that ought to be done—all respect, and the right people. And oh! I'm sure I don't know just what your dear uncle would have wished. He always settled everything." And she cried quietly again.

"Leave it all to me," said Eric, immensely relieved, and feeling as though he were shouldering her burdens with unbounded generosity. "Leave it all to me; don't think of anything, and try and sleep."

"Yes, dear Eric," said the little woman, the lifelong habit of obedience reasserting itself. "And you don't think I need see anyone, nor take steps—or anything, yet?"

He calmed her; took all responsibility, and left her crying and dozing at intervals.

Later he met the doctor, discussed his uncle's symptoms and the form of the death certificate; but after that, when heavy footsteps fell on the oak floor and creaked up the wooden staircase, he shut the dining-room door, and a shiver went through him which he was unable to explain.

Then he sat down to write to Elizabeth. It was no easy task. He asked her to keep their understanding a secret. Whatever he wrote would be seen by her grandmother and aunt, who, at such a time, would be anxious to have news first hand. So he wrote:

"My Dear Miss Maynell,—

"You will have heard the sad news of my uncle's

sudden death. Will you inform Mrs. Maynell of the event and tell her that my aunt has not unduly suffered from the shock?

"Yours sincerely,

E. Errington."

He thought a moment, tore off a second piece of paper and enclosed it, on which he wrote:

"Meet me to-morrow at the keeper's lodge at three o'clock.—E"

He stuck the envelope, and then, seeing a large seal on the table, he struck a light, and as he dropped the wax and pressed the onyx upon the paper he saw with pleasure the Errington arms stand out strong and clear-cut. The dignity of an old name and great possessions impressed him, and once more he rejoiced.

The interview with Elizabeth was very brief. She was full of tenderness and affection, but he was almost annoyed at the sympathy she lavished on his aunt. His own work and responsibility, it seemed to him, should have occupied her exclusively. Elizabeth was unwilling to talk of the future. It appeared to her cruel to dwell on the joy of their own future home in the presence of the sorrow which must send the woman forth from its shelter after such long years.

Altogether the meeting did not quite fulfil Eric's expectation, and he returned to the Hall irritated. There was much business to arrange; the undertaker had come. The agent, Mr. McEwen, was busy making lists of London and county friends and associates in business.

He was a tall man with a frank, genial manner, and was often dimly accused by Mr. Errington of being the "friend of the tenants." Certain it is that after

dinner he had often spoken very freely to the nephew as to the mistakes he thought his uncle made in dealing with his estate. He was always particularly confidential after some of the old port—a wine which was only produced if one of the partners of the London bank came down to Ilbury Hall, or on rare occasions when a country neighbor or a Tory Member of Parliament enjoyed the squire's hospitality.

Then Mr. McEwen would confide in the heir over a game of billiards. He would give him disagreeable details in a jolly way, of derelict farms, tumbledown cottages, always ending with prophecies of the evil times ahead for the successor to these neglected estates.

"Now Lord Oxenham, he's as near a bankrupt as a man can be, but, by Jove!" said Mr. McEwen, thumping the end of his cue on the ground, "I'd rather succeed to those estates by a long chalk. There's been some money spent on 'em. Farms are in pretty fair order. But here! Why, the tenants only hang on because they know a change is coming."

"The old man's got lots of ready," said Eric; "why don't you get him to spend a bit?"

"I know nothing about his banking account," said the agent; "I only know he gives me nothing to put down on the place."

To-day Eric sought the agent's company as a decided relief in the dreary stillness of the great house. He was sitting at a large table, surrounded by directories and packets of black-edged invitation cards, which he was carefully filling in.

"Of course I'm going by the county lists—the magistrates and all the principal people. I suppose most of them will come," he said, looking up; "but your poor uncle was not popular."

"Well, we must do the right thing," said Eric, as

he lit a cigarette. The phrase had been on his lips or in his mind many times during the last twenty-four hours.

Mr. McEwen made running comments on the history of the various people to be invited, guessed their income, the extent of their estates, and summed up their qualities. Presently he came to a name on his list among the C's—

"Cave, R." he read out. "That's the lawyer," he explained, "the man who holds the old man's will and all his papers."

"By Jove!" said Errington, "hadn't I better see him?"

"He was here to-day," said McEwen, "asking for you, but you were out. He is coming again to-morrow. He says he has all in readiness to open the will after the funeral."

"Did he tell you who are my uncle's executors?" asked Eric.

"Mr. Lamer, his late junior partner in the bank, and Mr. Cave himself," said Mr. McEwen. "He's a decent chap, rather starchy and stiff. I tried to get him to be a bit open with me, but he was very reticent, singularly so I should say. But I tell you what: I don't care if your uncle's left you the fortune of Crœsus, you'll have to spend two years' income on the estates, so you had better face it, Mr. Errington. I've managed for most of the big county families, and except your uncle, who was pig-headed about advice, I've not known one of them who were not obliged to spend their whole income to keep up their property as it ought to be managed."

"That's hardly a recommendation for your management, McEwen," said Eric, laughing loudly. Then he remembered, and stopped at once, and bent over the invitations again.

The afternoon before the funeral Mrs. Errington sent for Eric. She was sitting disconsolately in a black dressing-gown by her bedroom fire. As he came in she said:

"I hope you won't mind, dear Eric, if I ask you to come, but they are going to close, you know, and I should like to see him again, but I don't quite like to go alone. Will you come?"

She stood up, a helpless little figure, and held out her hands for support.

Eric disliked the request, but could not refuse; he bent down and gave her his arm, and with steps as feeble as a child, she tottered beside him into the passage. He endeavored to dissuade her gently, but she was persistent; so he unlocked the door where the dead lay.

The afternoon sun was shining in upon the room through drawn blinds, touching the faded carpet here and there, lighting up familiar objects, and resting upon the shining oak coffin which occupied the centre of the floor, flecking with moving light the white covering which concealed that which lay so still beneath.

Mrs. Errington did not hesitate. She went straight to her dead husband and asked Eric to draw back the sheet. Eric's hand trembled as he lifted the white cloth. He possessed a strong repugnance for all ugly things, and he dreaded the sight as likely to be unlovely and repulsive. But death is kind to those he claims, and the only touch of dignity ever possessed by the mean, narrow soul, had been accorded to him as the old man lay in his long sleep.

His wife seemed infinitely comforted. She looked at him awe-struck and admiring, and whispered:

"He had a great mind; he grasped things most people couldn't understand. I am sure he is happy now." And so, as she gazed, she began to weave that little

myth which is the beautiful winding-sheet in which so many dead are wrapped in the memory of their survivors.

The next day was the funeral. A dull, drizzling mist had succeeded the clear cold weather. The carriages had driven up, the mourners had been duly sorted by heated, eager men in black. The coffin had been carried out and placed in the hearse. The family vault had received the dead, and dry-eyed mourners had laid the old man to rest "in the sure and certain hope" which brought comfort to the heart of the faithful little woman who alone sorrowed for his loss.

Luncheon was laid in the hall and dining-room. The light streamed in again; and the dark rooms looked almost convivial on their return.

Eric was full of courtesy and consideration, as the notabilities came to him with friendly welcome to his place in their midst. By-and-by the remembrance of the occasion grew less vivid, and men ate, and talked loudly, and laughed by stealth like schoolboys. They discussed the property, the money Mr. Errington had left, the probable jointure of the widow, and looked at the young man with congratulatory interest.

Old Lord Oxenham, broad-shouldered, white-haired and ruddy, came to Eric and wrung his hand.

"Hope we shall have some good sport together," he said. "Your poor uncle wasn't a sportsman, but he was always straight about his foxes. But the place will be different now, and you'll bring a little life about it."

Eric thought of Elizabeth, and answered warmly. He liked this fine old English gentleman; and it pleased him to know how heartily he would welcome him as a nephew.

The guests had almost dispersed when Mr. Cave came toward him.

"Shall we get to business?" he said, clasping his hands, and putting his head on one side like a bird.

"Certainly, at once," said Eric, feeling that this was the point of the day to which all the rest was mere accessory.

The agent, the lawyer, the other executor and Eric walked into the library. The room was undisturbed, everything in its place, the dead man's papers and account books lay on his table. His letters were sorted in little heaps, tied with pink tape. It was difficult to believe that the shrivelled figure would no longer bend over his work, but was lying stiff and stark under the stones of the dark vault.

Eric listened to the lawyer reading the will in the language of the law, which sounds unnecessarily incomprehensible. The gist he understood. Two thousand pounds per annum was the jointure settled on Mrs. Errington for her life, to revert to the estate on her death. The estates were left to his heir at law, Eric Edward Errington, together with all money invested in consols or otherwise, and all furniture, plate, horses, carriages, busts, books, pictures, subject to the choice of any dozen articles to be selected by Mrs. Errington, the usual small legacy to executors and none other.

"Simple, business-like and straightforward, like your uncle," said the lawyer. "I congratulate you, Mr. Errington."

Mr. McEwen looked down on the ground. He was a little flushed; he had lunched well.

"It's all right if there's ready money," he said, "but if there's not, the place is a white elephant. I've often told you, Mr. Errington, every farm will have to be rebuilt and every cottage too. It's not my fault they are a heap of ruins. You know I've done my best."

The agent began to detail the advice he had given,

and wandered on to other estates on which he had spent larger sums of money; but the moral in each case seemed to be that the owner could never afford to live in his home again.

Mr. Cave looked sharply at him and tried to curtail the story.

"Mr. Errington," he said, with a short laugh, "was a careful man. If you like," he added, putting his head on one side, and looking at Eric, "we will go into the question of his investments at once. Indeed, of course, it will be necessary for the purposes of probate."

"Certainly," said Eric, "the sooner the better."

He felt sure that all was right, but he would be infinitely relieved when surmise was changed to certainty. The house was once more silent. The tables were cleared and the furniture replaced. Eric crossed the hall, put on his coat and hat, and set out on his way. He took the same road as on that first Sunday, when he set out in the hopes of meeting Elizabeth. To-day his face was turned toward the red manor house, and he had the same purpose at heart. The evening air was crisp and invigorating. The rain had ceased, the sky was clear, and the stars began to shine. The world was a good place, he felt, and he intended to enjoy the luck that came his way.

As good fortune would have it, Elizabeth was alone in the drawing-room. The lamps had not been lit. Miss Maynell had a bad headache and had gone to lie down. Her grandmother was resting, and Elizabeth was sitting on the hearth-rug in the firelight.

When Eric was announced she sprang to her feet and gave him her hand, and then as the maid left the room, he held her in his arms and kissed the upturned face. It was a relief to feel her—young, warm and living—after the dreary day, and to be able to speak

freely of all their hopes and plans which were now so interwoven.

"When may I tell?" said Elizabeth, shyly looking at him.

"Next week," said Eric. "I shall have got all his affairs straight, and shall know where I am. Besides, it allows a decent interval."

Elizabeth sat by him in the firelight with supreme content. He had never before been so tender, or shown her how much he really loved her. She was almost dazzled by the glory of her happiness, and her heart was full of pity for all who had no experience of such joy.

Presently a rustle of stiff silk betokened the advent of her aunt, and Elizabeth demurely moved to a chair opposite her visitor. Miss Maynell entered the room with appropriate solemnity.

"My mother and I take it as neighborly and kind of you to seek us out on such a day. We are glad to welcome you, Mr. Errington; I only regret that my mother cannot meet you herself to-night."

"Oh, never mind," said Eric cheerfully. Then, hardly knowing what to say, he added: "Lord Oxenham was at the funeral, and was most kind and cordial."

"My uncle never was on intimate terms with poor Mr. Errington, but the estates touch at many points, and I am sure he will be glad to have you for his neighbor," said Miss Maynell, who prided herself on always knowing exactly the right thing to say under the most difficult circumstances.

Elizabeth listened as she looked at the prim figure so wrapped in conventionality, and laughed inwardly with wild exultation to think of her surprise when she knew that this important man, so gifted and so great, had asked her to be his wife. She knew her aunt scarcely realized that any one was aware of her existence; how

delightful it would be to lay down the law and give her opinion, and know that it must be listened to, not swept away as wholly unimportant. She would come over from Ilbury and be kind to her. She thought what fun it would be to be able to tell her what she and her husband intended to do, and know that she could not forbid her plans, and would not dare to throw cold water on his wishes.

CHAPTER VIII

A LETTER reached Errington from Mr. Cave two days after the funeral to the effect that his uncle had invested £250,000 in a group of companies known as the Star, that he was making further enquiries, and would write again on the subject in a day or two. The information was enough for Eric. The income from such a sum would ensure ease, if not great riches; but added to what he would by-and-by derive from the estate, he was certainly justified in making his engagement known to Elizabeth's family. He determined that very day to ask her to speak to her grandmother, and publicly himself to announce his intended marriage. He was sitting at breakfast when he received the lawyer's letter. His aunt still remained in her room till a late hour. The fire was glowing, and the paper was beside him. Already the house began to assume a more comfortable and inhabited aspect.

He was about to rise from his meal, when a telegram was put into his hands. He opened it leisurely, like a man who knows that he has no bad news to fear, but the words made him start, as he read:

"On my way to see you. Important. R. Cave."

He asked for a time-table, looked at the hour the message was sent, and verified that he could be with him in half an hour. What could it mean? Was there anything wrong? He felt restless, troubled, angry with himself for having any forebodings of evil tidings. He turned over a thousand reasons which might bring the lawyer to him in haste, and rejected them all.

"Confound the man!" thought Eric. "Why not spend a few halfpennies more and avoid this unbearable suspense?"

He paced the room, unable to sit still, until he heard the door-bell, then went out hastily to meet Mr. Cave in the hall. He was taking off his coat deliberately, and when he greeted him, his face was devoid of all trace of expression, so that he could guess nothing. Mr. Cave put his head on one side, and rubbed his hands. The weather was cold, but seasonable, he murmured, as he followed Eric into the library. Then the two men stood still. The pussy-cat purr gave way to quick, short, business-like tones, as he said:

"Mr. Errington, I've bad news for you, very bad. I'm afraid your uncle has been unwise, for so astute a man curiously unwise. I find the affairs of the Star are involved in this World scheme, about which there has been such talk lately; that it is in the hands of some of the worst gamblers, such as Sugden and others on the Stock Exchange, and that the whole sum, or nearly the whole, is likely to be lost. Falsified balance-sheets, shifting balances at the bankers' and interchanging audit days; it's the old story. It's a bad job, a very bad job. I am really sorry for you," and the little man felt what he said.

Eric never spoke. It is difficult to grasp that the happiness we held so firmly but a moment ago has been dashed from our hands, that one blow has shattered our hopes and scattered our possessions.

Was it all gone? He remembered Mr. McEwen's account of the estate, and how the future hung on this invested fortune. His voice was husky as at last he said:

"It seems incredible. Are you sure of your facts?"

Mr. Cave opened a newspaper, and pointed to a paragraph which corroborated his statement.

"When your uncle died, I remember hearing from McEwen that the servants told him he had asked for me, and had said something about selling out stock, and mentioned the Star. No doubt this thing was on his mind. He knew there was danger, but it was too late, too late," he repeated meditatively.

"It is inconceivable," again said Eric.

A sort of despair was rising slowly, flooding his whole mind. The thought of the worthless heritage, the gloomy house with no money to maintain it, the diminished influence, and long years of necessity and economy opened drearily before him. Elizabeth struggling with a small income, and a growing family, he living a humdrum existence without shooting or society. The prospect seemed intolerable. For a moment hope alternated with his despair. Others had done it; they would be happy in their quiet way. Perhaps they could scrape £2,000 a year together. He might have two hunters if they were careful. And then the full force of the horrible disappointment surged over him once more.

"Mr. Errington," said Mr. Cave, "will you let me hear what you wish? I will meet the directors and ascertain the exact state of matters, if you instruct me, and we will save what we can from the wreck, but that will hardly be more than a shilling in the pound."

Mr. Cave got up as he spoke, and held out his hand sympathetically. Eric took it, and thanked him. The little man looked up at him, hesitated, and then said:

"You will forgive me for saying so, but you are a young man of much promise, with a good appearance, a fine old place and a good name. Marry a wealthy woman, Mr. Errington, and you will put it all straight again. A fine young man like you! Why the heiress will be lucky."

Eric did not smile as Mr. Cave grinned and winked facetiously. He looked away out of the window across

the park, and thought of Elizabeth; and yet the man's advice was not resented.

By-and-by, as he sat alone, he went over the whole situation. It seemed only to grow more intolerable. He read the newspaper paragraph again and again. There was no doubt as to the truth. Was there only one way of retrieving the situation? Perhaps the man was right, that it was necessary to renounce happiness if duty called him to build back his fortune. But could he renounce her? That was the question. She was so charming, so fresh, so original; no one else would ever be like her. No one could have a dull moment in her society. But pinching poverty, little mean economies, these were ugly and repulsive. His taste was wide and generous. Some men are made like that, and cannot be cramped, he thought. He wished he had not spoken to Elizabeth. He felt it would be unwise to announce their engagement. He would find her and tell her so. Anyhow, it was best to take time and to be prudent.

Telling Elizabeth was a more difficult task than he had imagined. He remembered as he drew near the school-house door, that she was taking a class of children for some carol singing. He could see her as he passed the windows, sitting at the piano, surrounded by the group of boy and girls, intent on teaching them the quaint air, and stopping the music to explain when the singing must go softly. The children listened eagerly, with the enthusiasm of those who admire their teacher. She struck a chord, nodded to them to begin afresh, when the door opened and Eric walked in. He bent over to her, and said in a low voice:

"Shall you have finished soon? I want you."

She looked up quickly, and said:

"They will sing it once, and then I will dismiss them."

The children sang it badly, but she did not stay to

correct their mistakes. They looked wonderingly as their lesson closed abruptly, and then clattered off.

Elizabeth shut the piano, put on her jacket, and went out into the school ground with Eric, and they turned up the lane which led to the lodge gates. Eric began to tell her his news. Elizabeth listened in silence. When he paused, she stopped, took his hand in both hers, and looked up in his face with her wistful eyes, and said:

"Eric dear, did you think it would make any difference to me? I only love you the more. For myself I am glad, it will give me the opportunity of showing you how I love you for yourself, and not for what you have. I have not been brought up in riches, and I will work and plan and economize. I really shall be happy in doing it, for I can show you now that you have not made a mistake, but you will have at any rate a useful wife."

Eric felt irritated. He had not expected her to take his news in this way, but rather to lavish pity on himself. Wholly unconscious of his attitude she went on explaining all that might be done, how the house could be divided, how happy they could be in one corner. Misfortune seemed really to have cheered her, he thought, and he resented her resignation.

"Of course," he said at last, "it is very dear of you to take the trouble as you do, but I cannot feel as cheerful. For a man it is a terrible blow to have no possibility of entertaining his friends, or indeed of seeing them, no hunting or shooting, or occupation—in fact, just nothing —unendurable monotony in a dead- and- alive country place, amidst shabby furniture, and with no prospect of the situation improving till my aunt dies. Of course a woman would not feel it so keenly, but for a man the trial is unbearable."

Elizabeth looked puzzled. Then she said in a perplexed voice:

"But Eric, dear, we have each other, and we shall be happy together. Of course, I understand it is much worse for you, much, much worse. It is selfish of me not to have seen that; but to me the happiness of trying to make you happy is such an absorbing prospect that I am afraid it blocks the view of everything else in my mind."

"My dear child, how foolish you are!" said Eric. "Of course I feel the same, only a man has so many things to consider, so much to face that a woman can't understand, that I feel I must have time to look at the situation all round."

When Elizabeth parted from Eric, she felt that something had jarred upon her. She did not want to analyze what it was that was wrong, but she told herself he was wearied and worried, that his mind was not balanced, but that once he had recovered from the shock, all would be well. She was disappointed that he had again made her promise to say nothing of their engagement.

Eric felt curiously irritable after his interview. How odd it was that she did not in the least grasp his position. She ought to make it easier for him. She ought not to require to have matters so plainly put before her, or at any rate she ought to have felt that it would be right to offer to release him. But she knew nothing of the ways of the world, or the trial of the situation to a man like him. Then the pendulum of this mood would swing back, and he would feel how charming she was, how delicate, and how devoted.

The next day McEwen spent the morning with Eric. He went minutely into accounts, and showed him the estate rent roll, a sum which would only cover the necessary expenditure and Mrs. Errington's jointure; and once more impressed on Eric the absolute necessity of either letting the hall or shutting up the place.

In the evening, as he sat alone, the full force of the situation was spread out before him. He was unaccustomed to worry. He had hitherto sufficient income to enable him to amuse himself. He knew that he owed a good deal more than he could pay, but he never dealt seriously with his affairs. Now his thoughts ran on death duties, the upkeep of landed property, the amounts necessary for any self-respecting man with a position to maintain. He took a pencil and paper and went wearily over the figures, expenditure on estates and buildings, say £4,000; agency and audits, say £500; death duties and probate, a sum he could not yet ascertain; gardens and grounds, £400; game and keepers, £600.

He paused, held his pencil between his finger and thumb; of course it was a necessary expenditure; No one could live in the country without it. Then he went on writing. Stables, £500. What remained? So far as he could see from McEwen's statement, nothing. There was a chance of something being recovered from the Star, but in his heart he knew it was remote. He lay back and thought, and as he smoked he looked into the fire. He had made a mess of things, and spoken prematurely to Elizabeth, and she did not seem to understand the situation, or realize how this miserable loss had changed everything.

"Of course I might never have dreamt of accepting it, but if she had offered to release me, it would have been right, and shown more understanding."

Then he fell to thinking of her, but somehow her moral qualities and her personal charm receded into shadow. The irksome want of money loomed so large. He got up and stood before the fire. The very change of attitude seemed to bring decision.

"Yes, it is damnably hard on both of us," he thought. "But it is best done now before we both suffer. Poor

little girl!" he thought, and he felt for a little gold locket which Elizabeth had given him at his request, a very small and simple trinket, which had contained her mother's hair, but into which she had put one of her own dark locks, and on the opposite side had written in tiny characters, "For my beloved, from E. M."

"Yes, she was a woman any man would love," he thought, as he held the little token in his hand. "I could not face the thought of another claiming her; and yet ——" He closed the locket and replaced it. "For the present there is nothing else to be done; I must get away and look at it all from a distance," and his resolve already seemed to have assumed the proportions of heroism.

* * * * * *

"There is nothing else for us just now, Elizabeth; you will have seen this quite plainly. I know I needn't ask you to be brave. We both need all the courage we can muster."

Eric was standing in the lane. Elizabeth was seated on a low wall, which divided one of the Ilbury coverts from the road. Her face was very white. Her lips were pressed tightly together, and she looked like someone who had just recovered consciousness after a period of insensibility. She looked at Eric while he spoke, as though she hardly understood his words. He spoke quickly, eagerly, as though he wanted to convince himself as well as his hearer.

"Things may be better by-and-by," he said. "Who knows? I may come back to claim you. In any case, my darling, I shall never love anyone else. I may have to marry someone with money, like the Hornden girl, but you will be my ideal woman till I die—my affinity—and I shall find you again, Elizabeth."

She looked up dazed, as though the fluency of his speech bewildered her.

"But if you love me, Eric, really love me as I love you, can't we be happy together, even though we may never be able to live at Ilbury, and never be rich?"

"My dear child," said Eric, "you don't understand. There are responsibilities resting on me, the people, the place. I must fulfil the calls of my position as a landowner. Oh, Elizabeth! don't make it harder to do right."

"I don't want to make anything hard for you. I would die readily," said Elizabeth, "if my little body could be a bridge over which you could pass to happiness. Only I can't quite see why you need suffer so. It seems to me it might be so much simpler to accept the loss of money, but not lose the fortune of our love."

"My dear Elizabeth, you must trust me," said Eric, with a wild longing to end the interview.

She looked so forlorn and so sad that a mad desire came to him to take her to his heart and kiss back the bloom in the beautiful white face that turned to him so pitifully; but he refrained, and tried to believe that his self-command was good.

"Elizabeth, I can't bear it. I have to leave by the night train. I go out into the wilderness without you, strong in the sense that it is right, but the world will never be the same."

She had risen. There was a silence. He hesitated. Should he take one last long kiss? Should he once more know the sweetness of her yielded love?

Footsteps on the road startled him. He dropped Elizabeth's hand, and looked round. A man's figure came down the lane with swinging walk, and in a moment they both recognized Michael Fane.

"Good-bye, Miss Maynell," said Eric, taking her hand and lifting his hat.

Michael was greeting them now, and as he shook hands with Elizabeth, Eric gave one long meaning glance, as he stood behind the broad shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"Good-bye, Fane," he said, and he was gone.

Courage is characteristic of woman, the courage to conceal, to bear and to go on. Men may lead the forlorn hope, may stand by the colors, and never flinch, may grasp the hand of death and never waver, when honor and duty hold him to his post; but woman can smile when the wolf gnaws beneath into the living flesh, or laugh when she holds the asp to her white breast. Hers is the courage of endurance, the power to be wounded and never murmur, to hide the wound through long days of suffering and go on fighting.

The rain was dripping steadily upon them, and to Elizabeth it seemed as though the tears of the world for her great heartache fell on her cheeks, the tears she could not shed.

There was silence for a moment. A sudden understanding had come to Michael; he saw the situation revealed. It seemed to him he must have known it all before, so vivid was the impression. He tried to retrace its origin, remembered that on this very spot he had met Eric, and had saved his life. The change he had seen in Elizabeth was now explained. She stood there still and white against the brown hedge, with the gray sky above her, and he realized that she had passed through the portal which separates childhood from womanhood. Their eyes met, and Elizabeth instinctively felt, though she could not have analyzed the sensation, that he looked at her for the first time as a man looks on a woman.

"Little Betty, you are in trouble," he said, "can I help you?"

"No, Michael, not now. Some day, perhaps, but not now. I will walk as far as the Mill with you," she said, and they turned down the lane together.

That evening Michael talked to his mother about Elizabeth, told what he had seen and what he believed she felt toward Eric.

"I don't trust him," said Michael. "I can't help feeling he has some mean streak in him. He has been playing fast and loose with her. Anyhow, I know she is unhappy. What do you think, mother?"

Mrs. Fane paused and looked into the fire.

"Yes, I have seen it," she said. "Elizabeth cares for him and she is miserable."

Michael looked up quickly.

"Can't you get her to see she is making a mistake? Poor little girl; he is not a man she can trust. What can we do, mother?"

"Wait," she answered; "that is all. A fire burns low if it is not fed, although sometimes it smolders a long time. But patience—that is the only thing."

"But it's terrible she should be made to suffer," he exclaimed.

She looked at him with infinite sadness, for a woman recognizes the first heart-cry of her son, and interprets it as unfailingly as she does his baby wail, which he lies at her breast.

It was already twilight when Elizabeth walked homeward. The ploughed fields showed brown against the gray sky and the hedges were marked in strong hard lines. The rain had ceased and stillness held the world as it prepared for night. She paused when she came to the crossways, and stood where she had parted from Eric an hour ago. She remembered that but a few days had

passed since she had been greeted with wishes for a happy year as she went down the village street and had turned to use the same familiar phrase, which seemed to hold for her such a beautiful hidden meaning. Now the same year lay before her, but she looked out on the wintry fields with other eyes.

"January is here," she thought; "cold, wintry January, with nothing to mark it but growing light in the gray sky. Then February will come with longer days, and the earliest primroses, and March with daffodils and wild flowers."

She saw them in her mind's eye already, a carpet of golden color under the brown of the wood copse; and April with thrush and blackbird, when the lanes would be filled with the scent of violets; and May. Her thought paused. May with its clear skies, its flowers and delicate green. In that month, Eric had told her, they would choose the holy day which should make them man and wife.

Again she saw the year stretched out before her as she had thought it of that morning, like a long sheltered lane. In May the way would lie between banks of bluebells and campion and bright bronze oak leaves, and white sheep with little long-legged lambs would look down on them through the fresh green hedges as they passed rejoicing. How sheltered and secure the year had looked! How quiet and peaceful the long lane of months that lay before her then.

But the lane had vanished from her mind; and instead of the ordered days and months and seasons, a pathless wilderness stretched out before her. The familiar way had gone. There seemed no landmark. She knew no friend to guide or help her; there was nothing but a wide gray space, like the width of the winter sea.

Was this the real land through which she must travel? Must she walk on and on alone through the measureless time that lay ahead? She could no longer catch a glimpse of the familiar milestones of next year and the next. Old thoughts and habits seemed to slip away from her. A few hours ago she had looked onward with the certainty of ordered peace. She had seen the path straight ahead, with never a cross-road where she must needs stop and choose the way; and now she felt like a child led out of a warm, lighted room, to see for the first time the "vast and silent night," and for a moment she was afraid. The height and depth and width of life frightened her. It was but for a moment, for like a child she tightened her grasp upon the Hand she had held securely through the years of her young life. The sense of a trackless future died down, and once more life came to her with its every-day outlook, and the year stretched out ahead with its old metes and bounds.

She turned across the field which led to the Manor House. A bent figure, carrying a bundle of firewood, came toward her. The twigs were sharply drawn against the winter sky, but the wearied figure was lost in shadow beneath the burden.

Elizabeth recognized old Betsy from the cottage by the gate, and quickened her steps to meet her. The movement seemed to bring relief.

"Why, Betsy," she cried, as she drew near, "let me carry that; it is too heavy for you"; and putting her strong arms around the bundle, she lifted it and slung the rope that bound the load over her shoulder, jerking the faggot into its place on her back.

"Lor', Miss," said Betsy, "it ain't fit as you should do like that. Indeed it ain't. Whatever would yer lady grandma say?"

"Leave that to me," said Elizabeth, as she turned

toward the cottage gate. "I'm glad you've got this load; I didn't know you were allowed to collect firewood."

"Well, Miss, you see, the old squire 'e's lying asleep now, and the young squire will be much more koind, they tells me, to us poor folk; and the old squire, 'e'l understand better now nor what 'e did, poor mon."

Elizabeth looked at the wrinkled face and the kind eyes dim with years. Old Betsy's life had been hard and full of pain.

"Don't you sometimes wish things had been different, Aunt Betsy?" she asked, as she looked at her, hoping to gain from her long acquired knowledge of sorrow some strong support.

"No, dear, "answered the old, thin voice. "No, deary, I doan't. It'll arl cum right, I knows that. There's the three children asleep yonder in the churchyard. I knows 'ow safe they is, and I'd rather they was there. We shall soon be arl together now. An' there's the old parson as was as good a friend to me as any ouman ever 'ad, 'e's over there too. What the Lord's took 'E's just stored up for me, an' 'E's keeping it arl till I cum, 'E is."

The slow, gentle monotony of the tone brought no comfort to Elizabeth.

"She has nearly got to the end of it all," she thought, as she laid the fagots down in the little out-house and turned to the garden gate.

It was getting dark, and as the lock closed with a sharp click, once more a storm of sorrow swept across her heart; she felt she could not walk the hidden path of submission along which old Betsy trod. She did not know that souls that are called out into the pathless wilderness may find light and color they could never see in quiet, sheltered lanes.

That night, when Martha kissed her in her bed before she blew the candle out, she felt her face was wet with tears, but she pretended she had not seen them, only her kiss was perhaps more tender, and when she left her she knelt longer than usual at her evening prayers.

CHAPTER IX

In the spring old Mrs. Maynell died. The flame of life burnt low in the cold days, and a blast of chill east wind extinguished the feeble flicker.

The hand of the great angel effaces all memories save those of gratitude and pity, and Elizabeth remembered only how helpless she had been through the winter months, and how she had welcomed her presence more than ever before; and her heart was sore when she came back after the funeral to the empty house which had so long been home.

The next morning Miss Maynell solemnly summoned Elizabeth. She sat by the fire in her grandmother's sitting-room, looking very thin and stiff in her new crêpe. Elizabeth instinctively felt that this interview would decide her future.

"I have sent for you," said her aunt, "to ascertain what your views are as to your place of residence. Your great-uncle has offered me a small house on the estate, as your dear grandmother's death will make it impossible for me to live here. I am, of course, willing to continue the responsibility of the charge my dear brother left me when you came to us. I cannot, however, be blind to the fact that you have not the submission to authority that I feel is due from the young to older relations, and that unless you are prepared to accept my guidance, it would be impossible for me to undertake the charge."

She looked at Elizabeth as though she felt she had dealt a final blow to insubordination.

"I am not ungrateful, Aunt Harriet. I know what

you have done for me, but may I ask if it is true that I have a little money of my own?"

Her aunt raised her eyebrows and clasped her hands as though praying for patience.

"Yes, Elizabeth," she said, "you have £250 a year, the entire fortune left by my dear brother."

Elizabeth looked at her. She felt desperate; she must make a dash for freedom. It was now or never.

"Aunt Harriet," she said in a low voice, which sounded to her far away and unreal, "please don't think I am ungrateful, but—I know all you have done for me, and how troublesome I have often been, but—I want a home of my own. I was twenty-one in November, and I should like to live with Nanny, and be alone. I should only be a trouble to you," added Elizabeth somewhat more feebly.

There was a horrible pause. Miss Maynell sat motionless.

"So this is the return," she said, in tones unnaturally slow, "for years of patient work upon your character and education—the return for a happy home and self-denying devotion. You want to live alone, and you are twenty-one, alone with a servant?" The voice grew slightly louder. "I am afraid your desire shows how far you are from realizing the dignity and modesty befitting a girl of your station and education, and that this desire springs from no good motive. I may be wrong; I hope I am."

For a moment the temptation was strong to defend her position, but with the despair of one who grasps at liberty by whatever means, she said:

"I am sorry, Aunt Harriet. I want to make my own life now, and I think we will talk of plans later."

Miss Maynell looked up quickly. She too realized what Michael Fane had seen; that Elizabeth was a

child no more. She rose stiffly, determined to be at any rate mistress of the situation.

"I hardly thought that on the very morrow of the day your grandmother was laid to rest, this would have been the tone adopted by the girl for whom we have both sacrificed so much. Elizabeth, please withdraw."

The girl turned and left the room, too thankful that the deed was done, to resent the accusations of ingratitude to which she had grown callous, so often had they been laid to her charge. She ran down the passage to her room. Martha was sitting by the window, mending stockings.

"Oh, Nanny, Nanny," said the girl, throwing herself on her knees and burying her head in the woman's lap. "Don't leave me. You are the only person I love, and who loves me"; and she sobbed with quick, breathless gasps like a child.

"Why, what silly notions have you got into your little 'ead? Leave you? not if I never touched another farthing's wage, and 'ad to keep myself on my bit of savings for the rest of my life."

Later, when she grew calmer, Elizabeth gave the history of the interview with her aunt. Nanny sat very still and listened. Then after a pause she said:

"I think you was right. Summer flowers die in November winds, and I believe she'd just wither you up."

And so it came to pass that Elizabeth settled to leave Ilbury. What should she do?

"Why, go to London, of course," said Michael, "and throw herself into social work." Her great opening had come, the moment for action, when her principles were to turn to practice.

Mrs. Fane remonstrated that she was young, and that it seemed wrong to make so deliberate a choice when she had seen so little of the world.

"Nonsense," said her son; "you wouldn't say that if she were going to be married. It's the only step that's irrevocable; and yet no one ever begs any woman who is going to marry a rich man to pause and take her time. Elizabeth has all the enthusiasm now to make her a useful worker. Don't hinder her, let her have her head."

Elizabeth did not need persuasion. She pictured to herself a life interesting but ascetic, full of beautiful restraints and simplicity, but lived in the centre of the real world where the heart of humanity beats. She saw visions of large buildings of conventual austerity, of quiet rooms, where work in the interest of those who lived in the ugly streets outside was devised amidst harmonious surroundings.

But Michael had no such visions. Indeed, it never occurred to him that Elizabeth had placed her usefulness in such a setting. He went to London and diligently interviewed the heads of Settlements and Mission Houses, but came to the conclusion that her work would be restricted and her outlook narrowed, and that she had better receive her own impressions and mix with his set where she would learn from the first the principles which can make social work of real value.

He came back from London triumphant. He had found the very place, a corner house in Marshom Street. One side looked on the court where her work would lie, for it was arranged that she was to collect the rents in that district, in order to give her intimate knowledge of the people, and show her the manner of life lived in a slum, and so to gain experience in the housing question. On the other side of the house was what he vaguely called "quite a good street." A nice elderly woman kept the place. She was clean and undertook the cooking. Martha would wait on Elizabeth, and she would be really in clover. Besides which, Miss Osterley, the

lady who was on all their committees and thoroughly understood all their methods, lived in the same house on the upper floor. What could be better? She could show her the ropes, and map out all her work and look after her; and their own place of meeting for consultation and business was next door.

What was the house like? Was it furnished? Oh yes, very simply. He could not remember much about it, but very tidy.

Some months later. The afternoon of her arrival remained in Elizabeth's memory among the tragedies of life.

"The dron'-room, miss," said a portly woman, as she threw open the door of a little front parlor furnished with a mahogany sideboard covered with crochet mats surrounding a plated biscuit box and a tea caddy, a mantel-piece of colored slate, the vain imitation of more hideous marble, on which stood glass candlesticks reflecting the afternoon sunshine in their cut pendants, a horsehair sofa, and some fans on the walls trimmed with plush. The centre table was spread for tea. A yellow tea-pot cosy, eloquent of poisonous tannin, crowned the centre. The cloth was placed corner-wise, and cakes were laid upon more crochet mats.

Such was the setting of the picture of her new life, and when Elizabeth was all alone, after she had gasped a few words of thanks and appreciation to her smiling landlady, she sat down before the tray and covered her face with her hands.

The place was intolerable. The same sun that was shining through the odious white curtains was shining now on the broad avenue of beech trees, and on the gray stone house so quiet and so strong, lighting the calm long rooms with the portraits of those who had lived their lives in that same home. All the dignity

and peace that were enshrined there came vividly before her. And then she thought of Eric with his fastidious taste. She could feel his contempt for the mean surroundings which now made the background of her life. She bowed her head and rested it on the little common cloth and cried till it ached, and her eyes felt as if they had got into their sockets by mistake and were many sizes too big for their swollen lids.

A knock at the door roused her, and a very small woman, dressed in a plain coat and skirt with a felt wide-awake hat, stood in the doorway.

Elizabeth got up and endeavored to hide the too evident signs of her discomfiture. She begged the little lady to come in, and said as cheerfully as she could:

"You're Miss Osterley, I am sure. Mr. Fane told me I might look to you to show me how to work. Do come in."

Miss Osterley held out a hand covered with a well-worn dog-skin glove.

"Yes, that's my name," she said heartily in somewhat jerky tones, "and I'm glad you've come. We're very short of workers, and there's lots to do," and she sat down suddenly, as though moved by clockwork.

"I hope you're strong," she said, looking at Elizabeth's pale face and red eyes. "Workers get so soon knocked up here. You will have to take care and live by rule; not do too much one day and be able to do nothing the next, but you'll have to learn the methods," and she gave a short laugh.

Elizabeth began to ask eagerly about the people. Were they poor? What could she do?

"We don't give anything away," said Miss Osterley decidedly; "we help them to help themselves. We don't believe in anything else. We try to teach them what they have a right to claim, and help them to claim

it. We have a strike on now, among the lightermen; many of them live in this district. We are doing all we can for them. Are you good with children? That will be your work at present, and that brings you in contact with the women too. Of course we meet dreadful problems. It isn't easy," and Miss Osterley looked puzzled and anxious.

"What shall I do with the children?" said Elizabeth; "shall I teach in the Sunday-school?"

"Oh dear no," said Miss Osterley, "we have no Sunday-school; we do not work with any church. Mr. Martin a clergyman, and Mr. Summer a curate, both belong to our branch of the Union, but we are all free to our own beliefs, and personally I am not a Christian."

She jerked out the last words with some amount of aggressiveness, but Elizabeth's long intimacy with the Fanes had brought her in contact with very free opinions, and she made no comment.

"You were very fortunate to get these rooms," said Miss Osterley, looking round cheerfully. "I had to wait ever so long before I got mine, and I lodged in the buildings, which were very noisy. And these are wonderfully comfortable and bright."

First impressions were still strong in Elizabeth's mind. She smiled a rather sickly smile, and said:

"Yes, I daresay it's difficult in this neighborhood to get anything," but she could not bring herself to be enthusiastic.

Miss Osterley explained that she had forgotten to tell Elizabeth about the work, which would be hers, of collecting the rents in the court, rushed upstairs, and pelted down again with little red books in her hands, and breathlessly began to explain the system.

"It's splendid training," she said; "you just go in and out on business, and you're able to make friends,"

and then she began a long description of how the system had started, and when she finished Elizabeth began to feel that, if all the world had set about collecting each other's rents, most calamities would have been avoided.

At last she said good-night, and added that she had two committees to attend. Both appeared to be organized as a living protest against some evil, the enormity of which Miss Osterley endeavored to explain hastily to Elizabeth. Then she went off, but in a few moments came back again to beg her to be sure to see her in the morning before she went out; there were some more important things she would like to tell her. And then, like a whirlwind, she was out again and down the street.

As the days wore on Elizabeth began to find compensation for the disappointment in her surroundings. Independence was sweet. Her work was full of interest, and she thought it absorbing. But perhaps she hardly realized how much pleasure she gained from the fact of being in the midst of people who discussed plans which affected the well-being of a whole nation, and yet she was appealed to for advice, her opinions were gravely considered, and she knew that she was someone of importance in her world, and to her, as to many others, such importance was delightful.

CHAPTER X

Miss Maynell prided herself on the fact that she never neglected a duty. Her niece was settling in London, and it was clearly right that she should be satisfied as to the propriety of her surroundings. So she decided to travel to town, and wrote to tell Elizabeth of her determination.

The letter brought consternation into the little lodging. There was no spare room, so one must be engaged at the Station Hotel, which was some way off.

"That is a comfort," said Elizabeth to Nanny, when they were discussing arrangements, "for she will have to be gone some hours at any rate."

Toward five o'clock on the appointed day Miss Maynell drove into Marshom Street in a four-wheeled cab, which was soon surrounded by a small crowd of gaping children.

"Let me carry yer bag, lidy," shouted some big boys.

"Arst me fer ter ring the bell," said a small and dirty girl.

"Go away, go away at once, children," snapped Miss Maynell; but their attentions redoubled, and only on the appearance of Elizabeth at the door did the small mob disperse.

"If your work does not make these wretched children more orderly," said Miss Maynell, after she had dryly pecked Elizabeth's cheek, "I should say you were wasting your time in this miserable neighborhood."

"It's early days, Aunt Harriet," said Elizabeth.

The sound of the familiar voice had already robbed

her of all sense of freedom, and she felt as slavishly abject as in the old school-room days, when she awaited the reprimand which was never withheld.

Her aunt made no comment on the house, but ate her tea in rebuking silence. Nanny came in and out, but she too was treated to cold disapproval. Elizabeth tried to glean small bits of village news, and asked after the people at home, but the conversation was not sustained and her efforts were not encouraged. Then she asked about the new cottage; was it comfortable?

"Quite sufficiently so," said her aunt. "My wants are few, and I only desire to live as a gentlewoman should, and to honor the good name I bear. I have no taste for modern eccentricities, nor do I desire to make a show of my charitable intentions."

There was a pause, during which Elizabeth cut the cake and offered it to Miss Maynell. She tasted it and laid it down with the air of one who would rather die than disclose the reason why she did not eat it.

"Don't you like it?" asked Elizabeth.

"No, I don't," said her aunt, and relapsed into injured silence.

"I am so sorry; what is wrong? Do tell me."

"It is made with bad butter. I should have thought Martha would have remembered I do not eat bought cakes, but that is a trifle, of course, like all my other likes or dislikes, in her eyes and yours."

Elizabeth could bear it no longer. Her indignation overcame her fear.

"Why did you come, Aunt Harriet? You don't care to see me; I am nothing to you, I never have been. You never liked me, and you always showed me you didn't."

The long pent-up sense of injustice burst its bounds at last, and rushed out with a great flood tide to sweep away the breakwaters of conventionality and fear which

had restrained it hitherto, as she poured out in quick short sentences her deep sense of her aunt's injustice.

Miss Maynell looked aghast. She sat bolt upright at the little table and listened to Elizabeth as though she was in a dream. At last, when Elizabeth paused, she regained her presence of mind, and said:

"I have taken a long journey in order to assure myself of your welfare. Is impertinent abuse to be my reception in return for my interest in you? I have felt that although there was much in your disposition to be regretted, you had at any rate that well-bred reticence which has always characterized us, but I find I have been singularly mistaken. And indeed, since you left Ilbury, I have learned with much humiliation how you have allowed your name—our name—to be lightly coupled with a gentleman whom your own ladylike feeling should have told you was only amused at your too evident liking for his company."

Elizabeth's cheeks flushed, and her hand trembled as she held her cup.

"What do you mean?" she said. "Please explain."

"It is not necessary," said her aunt, "you know as well as I, that neither your grandmother nor I were aware that you were constantly walking with Mr. Errington, and, indeed, I am glad she should have been spared the humiliation, although I am left to bear it alone," said Miss Maynell, wrinkling her forehead, and casting her eyes on the ground with her most aggravating expression.

"And why should I not walk with Mr. Errington?" said Elizabeth, holding her head very stiffly. "I imagine that you know that if I did so, he sought my company, and that I did not dog his steps. You must know me better than to imagine I should behave as silly girls do with a curate.

"It does not seem probable that he attaches great

importance to your friendship, as he is about to marry Miss Hornden," said Miss Maynell, suddenly raising her eyes and looking at Elizabeth.

Was this the reason she had come? The thought flashed through Elizabeth's mind before she had grasped the news she brought. If it were so, she should be disappointed.

"Is he really?" she answered. "Miss Hornden is a great heiress, and very beautiful, I believe. Will you let me cut some bread, as you do not like cake?"

The indifference of her manner fairly deceived her aunt.

"Heartless, utterly heartless," she thought, and she continued her lecture upon propriety, good-breeding and gratitude, feeling that she had played her trump card, but had lost the trick.

"If your good name," she continued, "is of no value to you, remember we bear the same; and I trust that the regrettable lack of consideration which you have shown for the proprieties of well-bred life will not now be transferred to another channel, and I warn you, as you have chosen this independent life, to be careful not to be equally reprehensible in your conduct toward Mr. Fane."

The thin voice rapped out the sentence like a hammer beating on a wire string.

The news which her aunt had brought had, however, begun to sweep over Elizabeth's heart, swamping all other feeling and making all other things insignificant. She only wanted now to be rid of her. The flame of her indignation had burnt out. After all, she was really free. What was the quarrelsome little woman to her? She almost felt a pity for her wrinkled yellow face, surmounted by her ugly black bonnet, and clad in bristling crêpe, with a heart that could not mourn, because it could not love.

"You need have no fear on that score," she said coldly; and Miss Maynell felt that her mission was ended.

After a little more desultory conversation she returned in a cab to her hotel, and Elizabeth went back to her daily interests and tried to believe that her love for Eric was dead, and fought hard and prayed often that she might think of him no more.

From time to time, during the summer, she saw Eric's name in the newspaper. He had dined at some public dinner; he had been to a levée or a court ball; twice she read that he had been one of the guests in a great country house party, where Lady Hornden and her daughter were also staying. The sun had been darkened for her all that day. Try as she would, she could think of nothing but Eric. She pictured him sitting at the piano, talking to this girl as he had talked to her, telling her of his visions, unfolding to her the meaning of his music, and then going out tall and strong among the men, no dreamer of dreams, but the embodiment of youth and power; and the dingy court looked more dreary, and the little room more mean, and the lifelong separation seemed more utterly intolerable.

At the end of the summer, when the baking pavements made the sunshine a misfortune, tired in body and wearied in spirit, news came to her which rekindled a spark of hope. The evening paper, as usual, was lying on the table near her tea-tray. She listlessly turned its pages, when she was arrested by a headline, "Marriage of Miss Hornden to Sir John Cliffe." The account of the wedding followed, a description of the dresses of the bride and bridesmaids, a list of presents, and half a column of the names of the guests. Eric's name was among them. So he had not married the heiress. The words danced before her eyes. The world looked already different. The afternoon sunshine made her glad. She no longer

felt tired. She wondered why he had not married Miss Hornden. Could it be that after all he knew that love was the only fortune worth winning? It never occurred to her as possible that any man could be preferred before him. She got up and went to the glass and arranged her hair. She looked worn; her face was very white.

"I will rest more," she thought. She hardly admitted to herself that she grasped the hope of his return as drowning men cling to the spar of a ship, and that already it seemed possible that she might yet be saved from the shipwreck of her happiness.

So joyous was her mood that when Michael came later to take her to a committee meeting he thought as he left her that night:

"Thank God, the cloud is beginning to lift; after all, wholesome work is the best medicine for every ill, and she will forget."

And then he stopped his thought; he would not allow himself to wander on, for he knew that in the maze of his mind it led to a spot where happiness was enshrined, and he dared not go in search of it, for he had not yet found the clew.

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"It's war," said Michael, walking into Elizabeth's little room with a newspaper in his hand. "War," he repeated slowly. "We can't grasp what it means, it is so long since it has touched us. It's the bitter fruit we are reaping of that shameful raid, and we are going to have a tougher job than they dream of, for the Boers are sharpshooters and hard riders, and from their babyhood have learned the veldt as a child learns its alphabet."

"Is it final?" said Elizabeth, getting up quickly from her low chair by the window. "Is it absolutely certain? It seems almost impossible. We have thought about

soldiers so long as playthings, haven't we? What have we to gain in return for the misery it will bring?" And her mind ran over the names of women she knew whose sons had "gone for soldiers."

She looked out over the street where the bright October sunshine was making dazzling white patches on the grimy pavement. The screaming voices of children, fresh from school, shrill, harsh and discordant, made a babel of familiar sound in the court. It all seemed so commonplace. It was impossible to believe that hundreds were feverishly turning the pages of their newspapers, feeling that the day of doom had dawned, and that before them stretched out the dreary waste of parting and the terrors of the unknown.

"Poor things!" she said, half to herself. "There will be many aching hearts to-day." And almost involuntarily she remembered with thankfulness that Eric was not a soldier.

But it was policy, and not people that absorbed Michael.

"If the mud in South Africa did not hold these cursed baubles, and men did not think their souls well lost for money," he said, "we should care nothing for suzerainty. If Griqualand had no diamond fields we could afford to let the Boers feed their cattle on the veldt. My God! what an awful responsibility to incur! It will be no light thing. It's going to be a longer struggle than anyone dreams. They will call out the reserves. Think what that must mean; the tearing up of peaceful men from peaceful surroundings. It's horrible, horrible!" And he sat down and covered his face with his hands.

"Well, I suppose if we were patriotic," said Elizabeth, "we should be shouting 'Avenge Majuba' with the rest; but a war of revenge does not seem very glorious to me from a Christian standpoint."

"Don't speak of that," said Michael; "it's profanity to those who believe in it. The god of battles is not the Christian's Christ, and yet every parson and minister in the country will be applauding our patriotism and slanging the Boers, and blowing the war flame into stronger blast; people who would not have a moment's enthusiasm for the battle which we try to fight at home for clean living and decent homes for their own countrymen. Bah—we are a nation of hypocrites."

"It's too late, Michael," said Elizabeth slowly. "If we who are Socialists speak inadvisedly with our lips now, when the country is in this ferment, we shall do much more harm than good. Do try and keep quiet about it all, and when you can't, come and vent it here. But don't talk like that to people who won't understand you and will only believe you are a traitor."

"Are you afraid of my talking wildly?" he said, looking at her and speaking softly. "I will be careful, don't fear; but I can't be silent when I feel I must speak."

He turned again to the paper with a groan. She looked at his strong figure and his firm limbs and thought he was cast in much the same mould as those sturdy men who were fighting in South Africa, possessed by the belief of the righteousness of their cause.

The door opened slowly, and they both turned to greet the new-comer—an old man with a face as white as his hair, sharp features, sad, deep-set eyes, a firm mouth, almost hard in repose, but with a smile which transformed his whole expression.

Elizabeth made a step forward and took his hand.

"It's war, dear Father Martin," she said. "You prophesied rightly. It seems almost incredible."

"I knew it must come," said the old man, "I knew

it." He laid his hand on Michael's shoulder with an affectionate gesture. "And it's a bad day, a bad day. It's not the misery only," he said, with a far-away look, as he stood staring out over the chimney-pots, "it's much worse; it's the demoralization that follows. At first people are sobered; it's a new step; there are partings, and danger, and dread. By-and-by they grow accustomed to all that, and then will come stupid inflation, vulgar national swagger; and by-and-by everybody will grow callous about the shedding of blood, and it's a scream for false glory. It often becomes pitifully degrading to national character, all the more so because there is something alluring in the thought—a victorious army—and the flag—and English honor—and those who know only the sound of marching feet, and see keen young soldiers in smart clothes and hear bands playing, feel the swing of the thing and are carried away by it. But the reality, which they never see—that is the horror."

"I dread it too," said Michael. "It diverts men's minds from living issues at home. Pressing questions must wait until the war is over. The people can go on as they are, and mugs as they have been, and everyone feels absolved from responsibility.

"Yes," said the old man, "it's a channel which diverts the flood for a bit, and when it comes rushing back it swells it tenfold and makes it more dangerous and more turbid. Work will be short, and money slack, and taxes high. That's the home-coming—the end."

"But, Father Martin," said Elizabeth, "don't they say it will open a land flowing with milk and honey? Won't it make new room for our people?"

The old parish priest shook his head.

"I think we Socialists have found the truth that the greater and more real the patriotism the wider our sympathy for all humanity. By-and-by we shall understand

better that God has made of one blood all the nations of the world."

Maurice Martin, whom Elizabeth, and indeed most of his friends, called Father Martin, was one of the best-known men in the poorest part of that district. For thirty-five years he had toiled in this densely populated parish. He had worked when the slums were unnoticed, and when no journalist described their horrors and no enthusiasts founded settlements or clubs. He had watched children grow to men and women, and had patiently labored often in spite of apparent failure and constant fack of funds, and that intellectual loneliness which is the lot of those whose work absorbs their daily lives, leaving them no time for social intercourse. But in the wilderness of misery where he had spent his life Father Martin stood in the mind of every docker, car driver or coster, no matter how drunken and worthless he might be, as the very embodiment of good. He had found work for them when times were bad; he had set them up again when they had failed. Nobody was ever so bad as to be hopeless. Nobody failed so often but that he was willing to give them another chance. He helped them in health, he sat by them in sickness, he married them, he baptized their children, buried their dead, but—

"'E could go for a bloke like a good'un," they said; and his look as he "pulled a man out of a pub' when his wife was dying" was one the man never forgot. "I tell you, I'd rather 'e'd 'ave fetched me one in the oie," was the way he described it.

The other clergy looked at him with suspicion. He was a pronounced Socialist; he spoke in an unguarded way at ruri-decenal meetings as to the responsibilities of the rich and the misuse of money. He was known to hold strong views on the income of bishops, and,

worse than all, he associated with men at Socialist meetings, and even admitted them into his house, who were dissenters and agnostics.

It was also rumored that he was careless about the boundaries of his parish, and had on more than one occasion visited a sick woman who came to his church but did not live within his spiritual beat; and when the vicar of this parish very properly remonstrated he had said:

"My dear fellow, these people have souls; we can't look upon them as pheasants to be preserved, nor consider our parishes as so many coverts."

The story had been much commented on in clerical circles in that part of London, and, as usual, Mr. Martin had been severely criticised.

Father Martin had a sincere respect for Michael. He saw in him qualities which won respect. And for Elizabeth he had an almost paternal affection, which she warmly returned, for he had been an anchor to her faith in the midst of the flood of humanitarian sympathy which recognized no unseen agency.

Michael, as a reverent agnostic, admired the old man's faith, although he had no part in his belief. He recognized the power of his inspiration, and loved him for his single-hearted devotion to God and man.

Some months after this conversation took place in her lodging, Elizabeth read in the local newspaper, which was sent to her each week from the post-office at Ilbury, that the Yeomanry were volunteering and that Mr. Errington was among those who would go to the front. For a moment the suddenness of the blow stunned her, and she sat dry-eyed holding the county newspaper, unable to feel or to think; and then a sense almost of thankfulness came to her that in the midst of danger and hardship she might still think of him and

pray for him. He was still hers; and the peril of war seemed less horrible than the great chasm which but a few weeks ago she believed had divided them for ever.

Thus it came about that on the spring morning when Eric sailed Elizabeth's heart was sore; but she tried honestly to turn to her work with renewed sympathy for those who, like herself, were constantly racked with anxiety but who were obliged to face daily life with a brave show of courage.

CHAPTER XI

KATHERINE HORNDEN was always quoted as one of the lucky beings on whom Providence with a lavish hand had showered all that can make life delightful.

As soon as she appeared in London, chaperoning mothers whispered to each other as they sat in the corners of ballrooms, that she would succeed to a large fortune when she was twenty-one; those who had sons said she how lovely she was, and how well she had been brought up; but those who had only daughters looked on her less favorably, and criticised her mother, whom they pronounced frivolous and artificial.

But their praise or blame affected Katherine but little. Everything was new and exciting; everyone appeared delighted to see her; and she suddenly realized that she was a person of importance in the eyes of many people.

Her mother was enjoying the early autumn of life, a considerable remnant of good looks and a large fortune, left to her by her husband. Her house in Park Lane was renowned for its dinners, and her beautiful castle at Lentham was celebrated for its Italian gardens, and the luxury which she provided for her guests. Lady Hornden had few enemies and many whom she called friends, that is to say, many people who cared to know her, and enjoy her hospitality, for she was always kind when it cost her no personal inconvenience.

She honestly believed that she had sacrificed herself to the welfare of her child, and certainly she had watched over her health and her looks with real assi-

duity. When the little girl was ill, specialists were summoned to advise on the most trivial ailments. She was surrounded by anxious governesses and nurses, and her nurseries and school rooms, her carriage and her ponies were the envy of every other governess and nurse in the park or the square where Katherine played. But the child's enjoyment was tempered by the drawback of being the object of such extreme anxiety, and she would gladly have exchanged her possessions and privileges for an hour's unrestrained wholesome play.

When she returned from the sea-side, Lady Hornden was in despair because she was brown and freckled. A skin doctor was consulted, and henceforth she was smothered in gauze veils when she dug her castles in the sand.

As regards her education, Lady Hornden had been very particular about her French and her German, and from time to time she questioned her governesses as to her progress. She had during Katherine's childhood taken every precaution that no foolish or romantic ideas should be allowed to get dominion over her. Once she had discovered, almost providentially, that an English governess had been talking wildly and putting silly ideas into the girl's head as to her future, the way she should spend her money, and utterly unpractical and really dangerous principles about poor people. Lady Hornden had acted, however, with great promptitude, and the mischief was stopped, although Katherine, who was impressionable and imaginative, had been quite bitten by the "romantic twaddle," as Lady Hornden described it, and her action was only just in time.

When the year came for her to be presented and make her appearance in society, her mother determined that she would spare no pains to make her début a success. Indeed, she spent almost as much time on the details of

Katherine's dress as on her own; and Katherine was as ready to enjoy ordinary pleasure, and as eager to be amused, as any other girl who has good looks, and money, and all that makes life desirable.

But a few weeks only served to reveal to Lady Hornden the rocks which lay ahead. Young men began without loss of time to endeavor to engage her daughter's affections. Toward the end of the summer the question, she realized, had become acute. She returned from the last ball of the season in a state of bewildered perplexity.

She was sincerely anxious to "do the best" for Katherine, and that night, having put on her dressing-gown and dismissed her maid, she sat down to think—an occupation in which she seldom indulged. She had, of course, discussed the merits of possible sons-in-law with intimate men friends, in whose judgment she trusted, but now she wanted to pass them quietly in review and really settle her own mind who she would encourage or discard before leaving London.

There was young Lord Munro. Of course he had the advantage of being a Duke's son; that was certainly in his favor, but then he had no money. She heard that he played heavily at the Turf Club every night, and then, although no sensible woman expected any young man to be an ascetic, still there were stories afloat which showed that even his admiration for Katherine had not yet brought about any readjustment of his private life, for Lotty Case appeared in new diamonds every two or three months, and all the world knew that they were the advertisement of his devotion.

Then there was Mr. Fordwick. He was a clever and rising man. They said he would be sure to be in the Cabinet some day, and he would have a good income by-and-by, when he succeeded his father, Lord Severton.

But he was plain and silent, and Katherine disliked him, and, after all, girls' tastes must be consulted.

Then her mind travelled quickly to a name around which gathered many disturbing elements, Eric Errington. He was singularly good-looking and fascinating, but his uncle had speculated away all his money; he had a big white elephant of a place which would only be an incubus, and he had not sufficient position to counterbalance the disability of poverty. He was undoubtedly brilliant, and very popular, but her whole mind said that this thing could not be. She remembered how eagerly Katherine welcomed Eric when he called, or asked her to dance, how pink she had grown that very evening when he came to take her to supper, and she felt that she must take care that things did not go any further. It seemed a relief to have settled that point, for it left her free to turn to a thought which brought far more security to her mind, and it was a real rest to begin to think about Jack Cliffe.

She wondered she had not arrived long ago at the conclusion that he really was the best man. He had no great position to give Katherine, but he came of a very old family, and a very large family too. Half the big names in London were his relations. It would be a great thing for Katherine to be thus surrounded by powerful people. It would be a solid marriage. He was a man everybody liked. The regiment was devoted to him, she had heard that a thousand times. He certainly was not very rich, but then he was not very poor. He was in the right set and knew everybody.

The more Lady Hornden thought about it the more the idea commended itself to her sense. No girl could possibly fail to like him, he certainly was delightful. Perhaps he was not clever, but that did not matter. Girls with money, like Katherine, did not need to marry

a genius. She had hovered round this thought many times before, but to-night she decided that Jack was really the best man by far; it must be Jack.

Katherine, sleeping in her little bed in her pretty bedroom, was supremely unconscious of her mother's decision. She certainly liked Eric better than any man who came to the house, but then they were all charming, and so long as she had a good time, she was almost as happy with one as with another.

By-and-by, when they left London, she did not perceive that Eric came less to the house and Jack more frequently, that whenever they went to Lentham it was Jack who always happened to turn up, and Lady Hornden was always equally surprised when she received a telegram to say he was coming. And so it happened that one evening, walking under the long pergola that led from the formal terraces to the Italian gardens, Jack asked Katherine to be his wife, in a very simple straightforward and manly way, and was supremely happy when she said "Yes," and Katherine found herself very happy too.

It was delightful to be engaged, to engross all Jack's thoughts and all Jack's time, to find how much interest everybody took in her, and to go with her mother to Paris, where she spent more money and time with the dressmaker, than even she desired.

One day, shortly before her marriage, somebody told her that Eric was unhappy. It had never occurred to her that he cared for her, and it seemed most wonderful that she should be the object of such a romance. So she sent a great many consoling messages to him, and wrote a very charming note when he sent her a little bracelet with 'God be with you' in diamonds.

She did not meet him again until her wedding-day; and when she came down the church she saw him in

the crowd of people and smiled at him, but noticed that he looked white and drawn. For a moment she felt a great compassion for him, but soon forgot all about it when she went out into the world with Jack.

Some months afterward, when Katherine met him again in a country house, he told her one evening under the stars out in the garden after dinner how he had suffered; and then she tried to persuade herself that the sight of his pain had to a large extent marred her happiness on her wedding-day. For she, like many others, began to look back on the past with new eyes, and she saw some things which certainly had escaped her at the time.

The knowledge that Eric cared for her seemed almost to give piquancy to the happiness of those early days. It was good to know that, although Jack was so devoted to her, there were other people who cared for her also, and it only served to make her realize her worth and to impress her with the favor she had done her husband in marrying him at all. But on the whole they were very happy, and certainly no cloud of jealousy ever rose on Jack's horizon to mar his content.

The days after Jack's departure seemed very long to Katherine. For the first time the door of fate had been shut in her face, that door which has no handle, which forces us to remain outside.

The experience was a new one. Her happiness had hitherto been the aim and object of everyone round her; the preservation of her health a religion, her enjoyment a duty. Now and then she had fancied that she would like to be free, even from those who labored to make life lovely, to go where she would without consulting any other will, to be able to start on the spur of the moment for Italy, when yellow fog descended upon London, to migrate like the birds to Egypt, and wake in the sunshine of the Nile Valley; or suddenly to sail to the fiords of

Norway when London life, transplanted to the Scottish moors, became irksome. Complete independence seemed to her a wonderful possession, because it was probably the only one she did not own. She would talk glibly of the joys of bachelor life in a flat, although the services of twenty servants barely sufficed to carry out her wishes. She sometimes envied women who earned their money and their freedom, when her dressmaker's bills would have been a sufficient income for several families; and now that temporary independence had come to her she could devise no means of using it. She wanted someone to consult as to the best plans for new pleasure.

If only Eric had stayed, she thought, as she looked at the collie lying on the rug beside her, we could have had some good times. And then she fell to thinking of his good-bye, and wondered how things would have been, if, instead of marrying Jack—dear good, faithful old Jack—she had opposed her mother and insisted on marrying Eric.

She remembered days in the garden at home, when he had talked to her of art and of music, and had read Shelley and Swinburne. No other man had ever talked to her in the same way. He was so reverent, so enthusiastic. She had felt sure that none had ever touched his heart but herself. How often he had told her that she had come, as Beatrice had come to Dante, a revelation of womanhood; but that was after her marriage, when he described to her his despair.

Poor Eric! She had made him suffer, and his was a sensitive nature; such suffering was torture. How well he understood her in all her moods. Dear old Jack knew nothing of her real nature, of her aspirations after the ideal, of her artistic temperament, which Eric had often told her was the world's blessing but the possessor's curse.

Yes, if Eric had not gone, these months would have been a time for expansion. She would have breathed new air, and opened to a new consciousness of power. Life would have ceased to be commonplace. She was tired of the chatter of London society, of Bridge, of dress. She saw herself the centre of a sterner world, in a setting of exquisite simplicity, the rubbish of life cleared away.

After a little consideration she determined to make a holocaust of it as relentlessly as a Savonarola. She would tolerate only the best pictures, the most perfect furniture, the most precious ornaments. She would dress differently, drape herself in long, straight garments, and twist her fair hair into Greek coils. She threw herself in thought into a part she felt that she could play. She saw Eric walking with her in her dream. She knew how serenely happy he would look when he saw how her surroundings had changed, when she sat talking to him on his return against a background of white lilies. But dear old Jack! Where would she put his whips and golf sticks? How ill at ease he would be! How little he would understand her mood or enter into the scheme of beauty she had planned.

She thought of the two bears he had shot in the Rockies, which stood in the hall. He had them stuffed to hold electric lamps. Of the rare Indian monkey he had given her, which hung by a silk cord from the ceiling in her sitting-room, and she shivered. Eric had taught her that such things were a transgression against the first canons of art. Therefore, of course, they must be sacrificed at once. She would set about making these changes now; it would interest her to lay the foundations of a new career. She would buy books and read diligently while Eric was away, and by-and-by, when he returned, he would find her in this new world, full of intensity and color.

Uplifted by this ideal of artistic severity, combined with luxury and beauty, she determined to lose no time in setting about her work. How Eric would rejoice in her complete understanding of his principles.

Katherine drove that very day to one of the most famous decorators in London, renowned for the extreme costliness of his simplicity. She was anxious to spend some hours in thoroughly imbibing the sentiment of the style that was new to her. She wanted to make no mistakes, but she felt that deep down in her real mind, if she were honest, she would be obliged to admit that much of what she saw found in her no appeal—stiff flowers and long straight stalks, attenuated birds and subdued color. She sighed for more obvious representations of roses and daisies and lilies, interlaced with bright ribbons. The severity of the furniture was chilling, but she allowed no glimpse of her real taste to appear. The tall young man in a pale green tie, was didactic.

"This cabinet," he said, pointing to a straight upright cupboard in gray-colored oak, "is designed by Lowry. It is absolutely pure in taste. The lock is a gem."

Katherine looked at the square of beaten silver, and could see very little to admire.

"The curve of that," said the young man, holding out a key with a heart-shaped handle, "is singularly happy."

Katherine thought of her buhl cabinets which Eric abused, and knew that she saw their merit, but the charm of this unadorned gray wood was like a language she did not understand. She passed from room to room, until she came to a corner furnished for the instruction of æsthetic neophytes. Here the young man paused.

"This," he said, "is very true." And Katherine knew that although she had uttered no word he had gauged her ignorance.

Of course, according to this example, every corner of her house was wrong. The shape of the windows, the curtains, the carpets, all must be remodelled. She felt no hesitation as to the necessity; and indeed, next day, when the tall young man called upon her, the terrible silence he had preserved as she led him through her rooms made the urgency of such a change more obvious.

How much Eric must have suffered, she thought, as she saw the expression in the young man's face as his eye rested on a Minton china pug dog with a blue ribbon round its neck which sat by the fireplace in her boudoir. She remembered being really pleased with it when it was given to her, and thought it singularly life-like and ornamental.

After a while the tall young man began making notes, and at last vouchsafed to say in a slow, soft voice:

"Of course, my lady, you are aware the whole house is so absolutely —— incorrect that it will be best to make a scheme, commencing with the ground-floor rooms, and work upward, as the structure will want radical alteration; the shape of the windows, the fire-places," and he waved his long hand, as though to include all things in his condemnation.

"Yes, I see," said Katherine. "Let us begin with the downstairs. Get designs ready, and let me see them. But I am in a hurry; no time must be lost."

He looked at her critically. As a tradesman the sentiment suited him; as an artist it was reprehensible. But he bowed and withdrew.

Katherine looked round at the gay chintzes and colored cushions and damask curtains, and sighed. Still Eric should find her in the setting which appealed to his taste and knowledge.

She would say nothing of her intentions; she could not bear the protestations of her mother, or the jeers of

Anne. She determined to slide gradually into her new part, and make the change imperceptible.

That day she lunched with Lady Hornden, and afterward Anne fetched her for afternoon shopping, and at five o'clock they agreed to call on Lady Augusta Leaven, a mutual relation, a visit they deemed a troublesome duty, and therefore seldom performed.

CHAPTER XII

LADY AUGUSTA LEAVEN was at home, and delighted to see her "kinswomen," as she called them. She was conscious that they lived in a coterie more modern than her own, but she argued that after all the passing fashion of an hour has no real significance; it is birth only which really sets distinction on the individual, and worth, she would have added, for she believed that she possessed both.

The western sun was pouring into the drawing-room in which the three women sat at tea, lighting up the banal Dresden figures and small herds of china animals which crowded every table and bracket.

"I put aside two days in the week for doing good," said Lady Augusta, as she poured out tea with her fat, jewelled hands.

"How satisfactory such a consciousness must be," said Anne Rodney. "It would be a real comfort to have such a certainty."

There was a slight inflection in her voice. It was not a sneer, but it was like the suggestion of cold caused by a momentary draught of air on a sultry day.

Lady Augusta looked up quickly, but detected nothing. She was not keenly appreciative of shades; she only understood what was acutally stated, or what she thought had been stated.

"Yes," she continued, "of course it is. I go to the East End, where I conduct a class of mothers. One hundred women under my direct control. I tell them what they should do, how to manage their homes. I keep them from drink, and then, you see," she said, as

though she had reached the crowning height of beneficence, "I show them how impossible it is for the masses to exist without the classes."

"How interesting!" murmured Lady Cliffe. She could not find any more suitable expression. She knew that Anne was criticising her hostess, and she felt that she must show her appreciation and yet reserve her opinion.

At that moment the door opened and a small middle-aged woman, with a round, genial face and friendly manner was announced as Mrs. Dorine. She shook hands warmly with Lady Augusta, and appeared delighted to greet the two visitors. She murmured little rippling sentences about "ages since they met," and the difficulty of finding friends in London, and finally settled herself into a chair, and took the cup held out to her, turning and chirping and twittering like a bird in spring.

"We were talking of my work," said Lady Augusta, "and I was saying how interesting, indeed how absorbing, it becomes. I have no fears of socialism," she continued, looking at Lady Cliffe, as though the interruption should not debar her from hearing the weighty things she had to tell her. "The lower orders are perferctly aware of the value of the aristocracy. It is the middle classes that bring about the trouble. I believe we shall have no peace until we deal entirely with the people, and ignore the assumptions of those who are trying to push upward."

"Will not that be rather a difficult task?" asked Mrs. Rodney, as she stirred her tea gently, looking at Lady Augusta with half-closed eyes.

"Oh, not at all," answered Lady Augusta. "Once the people understand who are their true friends they will rally round us. It was so in the French Revolution," she added vaguely.

"They rallied round their heads a little too late to accept active leadership!" said Mrs. Rodney.

"Of course," continued Lady Augusta, ignoring the last remark, "it requires experience to deal with the scum."

"Scum always rises to the top, doesn't it?" asked Anne Rodney provokingly.

Lady Augusta looked puzzled for an instant.

"Oh no, it doesn't," she said; "they have no leaders; and besides, drink keeps them down.

"I see. Then it seems to be as well to keep on the stirring process."

Mrs. Dorine had been listening with her head slightly poked forward. She felt that the air was electric, and that storms threatened.

"Have you seen that delightful girl," she said in her most bird-like tones, "who is working in the slums, as you are so constantly in the East End, dear Augusta?"

"No," said Lady Augusta, rather loftily. "What girl? I don't understand you, Fanny. There are so many girls in the East End."

"Why, Elizabeth Maynell, Lord Oxenham's niece. She has gone to live right among the poor, and they say she is almost worshipped. Such a beautiful, refined creature. I think she must be a saint."

Lady Augusta looked annoyed.

"Oh, Elizabeth. Of course I have known her all her life. I call it ridiculous exaggeration, and moreover, from my knowledge of the people, not at all likely to win respect, as they know the gulf between us quite as well as we do."

"Oh yes, of course, dear," answered, the chirping voice, "only she tries to do good, and it's very touching. It may'nt be quite our way, but really it's very self-denying—an ugly lodging-house, and poor little rooms."

Lady Cliffe looked up sympathetically.

"I call it beautiful," she said. "I should like to know her. She must be a modern Saint Francis." The idea appealed to her imagination. She could understand the fascination of being beloved and reverenced. "Will you let me drive you down there, Augusta? I want to see Saint Clara. That is the only female complement to St. Francis I can think of."

"Oh, dear Lady Cliffe, how delightful!" said Mrs. Dorine. "Of course, she will be enchanted. Her life is very restricted, and she ought to see people of her own class. Some society would be good for her. Dear Augusta," she added, feeling she had committed an unpardonable breach in diverting the stream of attention from her special channel, "you will be sure to give her this great pleasure?"

"Yes, some time; but really, when I go to the East End it is to undertake serious duties quietly, not to see these young ladies who make themselves conspicuous as modern saints."

Katherine Cliffe looked at Anne and smiled furtively.

"How tired you must get!" said Mrs. Dorine, sympathetically. "You have your daughters to take out, and your house to manage, and all the thousand things that a London season entails. It must be very hard to keep pace with such work besides."

"Yes," said Lady Augusta, beaming out again from the momentary cloud behind which she had for a while hidden her complacency, "but I have a strong sense of duty, and I have brought up my girls to feel all they owe to society, and they are fond of work among the poor. I am thankful to see how happy they are in quietly doing good. I disapprove so much of these noisy movements that force women to the front. I always tell them that we can do so much more by our influence, than by

'rights' and all that sort of thing. Besides," she added, turning to Lady Cliffe as more likely to understand her, "men dislike these modern ways so much. They talk to these girls, and laugh with them, but the nice men don't marry them."

"I don' know about that," said Mrs. Rodney. "Look at Mr. Asperton, who has just married Miss Dorothy King. No one was more independent or unchaperoned than she. She was a regular hooligan girl, and he is a nice man; he certainly must have twenty thousand a year."

"Well," said Lady Augusta, "in my day that girl would never have been looked at. The men have degenerated under the influence of these modern women, and certainly it is a struggle for real conscientious mothers."

"They are not tempted severely," said Mrs. Rodney, "because when the *partis* don't propose their love of pure gold is not tried as by fire."

At this point both women rose, and, holding out her hand to her hostess, Mrs. Rodney said:

"Good-bye, dear Augusta, I must go. I have to see my sister, who cannot go out, as you know her father-in-law is dead."

"Yes," said Lady Augusta eagerly, "I know. Of course death is so sad in a house," and then, after a pause, she added, "So of course they succeed now?" It's a splendid position. What a lift for them!"

Lady Cliffe smiled, and Mrs. Rodney, who stood beside her, laughed outright.

"Yes, it must be like the mad moment when you leave the servants' hall and 'move to cheese' in the housekeeper's room. Human nature is all the same, from the scum to the dregs. Good-bye, Augusta. Take me some day to see your hundred women. I should love to hear you talk to them."

Lady Augusta hesitated for a moment, uncertain as to the sincerity of the remark, and then, as the certainty of her right to praise, prevailed, she answered cordially, as she turned to ring the bell.

A moment afterward when the door was closed, and the two women descended the broad dark London staircase, which was the facsimile of every other staircase in every house in that conventional row, Anne Rodney said:

"That woman amuses me more than I can say. She is an interesting study. I'm always wondering if she really admires herself profoundly, or if she believes that you will only take her at her own valuation, and puts all her wares in the window. Whichever it is, it is very funny. She takes herself seriously as a great philanthropist. If she really were one, she would probably be an intolerable bore; but as it is, her mind is like a lucky bag, you never know what you are going to draw out of it."

"I always feel sorry for her when she makes a fool of herself," said Katherine.

"How young!" said Anne, "or rather, how old, for the young are generally frankly brutal. But what really interests me is to study in her a fine natural snob. It sits on her with all the ease of one who is born to it."

"I think she means to do good," said Katherine.

"I cannot so much as mention the road which is paved with such intentions. Anyway, it leads, in her case, to Whitechapel."

"I want to see the real thing," said Katherine, "little Saint Clara in her slums. What a terrible problem life must be to her!"

"Yes," said Anne, as she got into her carriage, "but we're not called to solve it, and certainly Augusta never will."

The streets were blocked with carriages as Katherine

Cliffe drove toward her house in Hill Street. The rhythmic trot of the smart ponies in her victoria was constantly brought to a sudden halt by the wave of a policeman's hand, as long lines of cabs, carts, omnibuses and foot passengers were allowed in turn to cross where the thoroughfares met.

As she watched the passers-by mechanically her thoughts turned to the conversation in which she had just shared. Of course it was very well meant of Augusta, she thought, to try and do some work for the poor. She could not quite approve of the sneering way in which Anne spoke. It was very difficult to do good in London, one was so likely to be taken in. She recollected certain warning notices sent out by the Charity Organization Society, and she felt a strong sense of how extremely careful rich people should be not to harm the poor, who were so prone to prey on their generosity. Still, when she went back to Chillam she would do more for the village. Of course it was quite right to help the cottagers, it was only in London that one had to be so particular.

Then her thoughts reverted to the conversation again. Whitechapel! What a long way off that sounded! She wondered what it was like, and how the people lived.

The dull roar of carriages rose and fell. For a moment it seemed like the bewildering grind of machinery that manufactured human life. How strange that she should be driving down Piccadilly that sunny afternoon, and there should be within this city another, with teeming millions, about which she knew nothing, a people as foreign as though they spoke another language, who lived a different life—and little children—— Why should she think of it? The thought was not agreeable, and it must be wrong to trouble over that which none could remedy.

She looked up at the trees that shaded one side of

the long street. They were vividly green, with their blackened trunks and boughs, and then the thought came to her, she would send some flowers to a hospital, the Children's Hospital, perhaps. The idea seemed to bring relief. Yes, she could do that; it would entail a note to her gardener, and she must remember to send a servant to fetch them at the station when they arrived.

She lay back enjoying the evening air, as though she was absolved from some weight that rested on her conscience, and she returned to her plans for beautifying her house with increased content.

CHAPTER XIII

A CARRIAGE in Marshom Street was almost an unknown excitement. Once or twice cabs had stopped at Miss Maynell's door, but when a "kirridge as 'ad no 'orses, and a driver man and another bloke all dressed aout in buttons and shiny caps" drove to the corner of the court, as by magic, a crowd of children suddenly gathered, and when one of the men got down to ring the bell, a circle of eager, excited faces crowded round the two ladies who occupied the car.

"It's a mauter car," said one, as though possessed of all knowledge.

"It's got a machine inside of it as mikes it go," said another.

"Ain't it bloomin' foine?" said another.

"Tike me for a roide, lidies," said a bold little imp, with his head on one side.

"'Old yer jor. Dessay it's the rorerl fam'ly," called another.

"She's a good un," was echoed in chorus, as Lady Augusta stepped down from the high step on to the dirty pavement.

Katherine followed her. She looked at the children with wonder and repulsion. How dirty and noisy they are, she thought. How ugly and gloomy and dull it all looked, this hideous little house; no one with an artistic temperament could bear it.

Lady Augusta was already in the narrow passage, talking to Martha.

"Tell Miss Maynell," she said in a resounding voice,

"that Lady Augusta Leaven has come to see her, and that she has brought Lady Cliffe to call on her."

Without any hesitation Martha opened the door of the stuffy little sitting-room and asked the ladies to please be seated, and went to find Elizabeth.

"Lady who?" said Elizabeth, when Martha gave her the message. She had just come in, and was standing in her small bedroom.

Martha repeated the name.

"Lady Cliffe—Katherine Hornden? How strange that she should come! What did she know? Had Eric ever spoken of her?" And curiosity leaped up quickly in her heart.

In another moment she was shaking hands with them in her ugly sitting-room.

"I was telling Lady Cliffe the other day of your work and mine. She was so much interested she wanted to see it for herself. She has never been in the East End before, and does not know the people as we do," said Lady Augusta, with a patronizing smile.

So Eric had not spoken of her, was Elizabeth's first thought, and she turned and looked at Katherine with the interest every woman feels for another who has been associated in any way with a man she loves.

Katherine, tall, slim, and fair, looked very fragile and refined in the midst of the sordid surroundings of the little lodging. Her pretty fluffy golden hair framed her oval face with its delicate pink and white coloring, and the large gray eyes looked at Elizabeth with undisguised interest and admiration.

She had not expected to find a tall high-bred woman with a head set like a queen's on the long white column of throat, and velvety dark eyes with pupils that changed and distended as she spoke. What history could have brought her here? she wondered. Could it really be

from love for these people, or some great unsatisfied passion which drove women into convents in despair?

Utterly unconscious of such conjectures, Lady Augusta threw herself into an arm-chair. She had come to show Elizabeth off, and she did not mean to be deterred from her object.

"What can Lady Cliffe see of your work, my dear?" she asked. "She has come all the way from Mayfair, and has been so anxious to know you, and to see the East End, ever since I described what you are doing."

"I hardly know," said Elizabeth smiling. "The work is very humdrum and ordinary."

"Oh, not at all," said Lady Augusta; "I always hold that your mother's meetings, and mine in Bethnal Green, are as interesting as any in London. Mine is smaller, but of course I can't give much time to it. The calls of a thousand things are such a drag on me. Indeed, my children all tell me they can never understand how I manage to compass all I do." And Lady Augusta sank back into the arm-chair large and complacent.

"I wish you would tell me what you do, Miss Maynell, here in these horrible streets," said Katherine. She looked eagerly at Elizabeth; she was really interested.

"I don't do much," said Elizabeth a little stiffly. She was not inclined to be exhibited. "I live here, and these people are my friends, just as the people are yours among whom you live."

"Hardly that," said Lady Augusta disapprovingly. "However kind one may wish to be, one can never be really friends with people of another class; but of course it must do them good to know you take an interest in them," she added more blandly.

"They do me good," said Elizabeth. "Their patience and courage and unselfishness are a constant reproof.

I could tell you of women here whose husbands are reservists and have gone to South Africa, and they are struggling to get daily bread, with seven and eight children, all depending on them, and half mad with anxiety about him, and yet you never hear a word of complaint; they just go on."

Katherine was listening with glistening eyes.

"My husband is in South Africa," she said. "I wish I could do something for them. Do you know anyone who has gone? I mean anyone near to you."

"Yes," said Elizabeth; and then there was a moment's pause.

"The difficulty I find," said Lady Augusta, who had not been listening, "is to get any idea of thrift into their heads. They are so wasteful in their cooking, and in dress, and in fact in everything. They will not learn to make a *pot au feu* with broken bits, or how to cook little dainty things which can be made so cheaply without meat, in my Thrift Club——"

"What do you say to that?" said Katherine, interrupting the details which she felt must follow, and turning to Elizabeth.

"I feel," said Elizabeth, looking at Lady Augusta, "that we really do not understand how difficult the women's lives are. Think of the rooms in which they have to exist; look at the grates in which they cook; the horrible handicap of everything. I don't wonder that they don't do better."

Lady Augusta was shocked.

"There is no excuse," she said; "it's drink that keeps them in this horrible state."

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "very often it is; but then remember the conditions in which they live, in which they sleep—five or six in one room in a dark little street. Think of waking in such an atmosphere. Do you wonder

every taste is vitiated? I don't. I hate drinking as much as you do, but I often feel that if I were in their place I should do the same."

Lady Augusta shut her eyes as though overcome with pain.

"Well, but what's the cure?" said Katherine eagerly. She was very susceptible to the influence of enthusiasm.

"The awakening of public conscience, and more power in the hands of those who know, instead of those who theorize," said Elizabeth. "A better fed, better housed generation would soon have different tastes."

"Would you feed the children in the schools?" said Katherine, plunging unknowingly into a vexed question.

"Certainly not," said Lady Augusta. "Decidedly not. All the bishops are against it."

Katherine looked inquiringly at Elizabeth.

"Yes," she said, "with certain safeguards, I would. You must create a new generation, better bred, more intelligent, with a higher standard of living, before you are going to get much further."

"That's socialism—rank socialism," said Lady Augusta, getting out of her chair; "and socialism will be the destruction of religion, and I mean to stand by my Church, no matter what the persecution may be."

"I don't think we shall all be led out to lions and tigers," said Katherine. "Besides, Tolstoi says that Christ was a Socialist, doesn't he?"

"Tolstoi is not a Churchman, or indeed a Christian," said Lady Augusta decisively. "Now, Elizabeth, what can you show us?"

"I am afraid, Lady Augusta, I have nothing to-day till our girls meet to-night at the club. I could take you through the court to see some of the people, if you like," she said to Katherine. But the proposal was not

eagerly met. Katherine had visions of dirty staircases and ill-smelling rooms. She would much prefer to stay and talk to Elizabeth.

"No Band of Hope, or Mothers' Meeting, or Clothing Club?" said Lady Augusta. "I should have thought that there was never an afternoon without some meeting or other."

"To-day is Saturday," said Elizabeth, "and we are all busy cleaning and getting ready for to-morrow."

A knock at the street door interrupted her and she got up and went into the passage.

"Why, Sally," she said, as a tall lanky child stood on the threshold, "do you want me?"

"Yes, Mrs. Maynell," said the child. "Please, Mrs. Maynell, will you come over and see mover to-night? She says as 'ow she wants yer particler."

"What's the matter, Sally?" asked Elizabeth.

"Oh, nofink; only I know as 'ow she does want yer perticler. Will you please to come?"

"Yes, I'll come," she said, "but it may be late."

"All right," said Sally; and the pale face lit up with a smile of friendly understanding, for she remembered the grand visitors that were inside, as the "moto was a standin' at the door with two driver men a waitin'," she afterward explained on her return.

Elizabeth went back to her room where Martha had brought tea. Katherine was anxious to know about the child, whose voice she had heard in the passage.

"She and her brother are two of the wildest imps in the alley. The father and mother both drink, and yet those children, who haven't a chance, humanly speaking, are the most warm-hearted darlings that ever lived," said Elizabeth enthusiastically.

"It's the dirt that must be so trying," said Katherine.

"Oh, you can get used to anything," said Elizabeth, pouring out the tea.

The conversation drifted during the meal to the excellence of the hot buttered toast and the value of such a servant as Martha, and both visitors declared that to have one servant was really the only comfortable way of living, neither of them having tried the experiment.

"Good-bye, my dear," said Lady Augusta, kissing Elizabeth. "It has been very delightful to see you, and next time we shall hope to see your work."

"I may come again," said Katherine, holding Elizabeth's hand. "I should like to talk to you all alone. I should like to help you, if I could. While Jack is away I should be very glad to do something useful. I couldn't undertake what Lady Augusta does, but I should like to feel I could be some tiny use to you."

"Thank you," said Elizabeth; "I am sure you would like to help. It really is a great happiness."

She watched her as she crossed the pavement. So that was the woman who wanted to marry Eric, she thought, and a great hope grew in her heart as she wondered why he had resisted so much charm and so much wealth.

Elizabeth waved good-bye as she stood in the dingy little street, and the brougham purred softly and glided away to the other end of the great perplexing city.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Elizabeth got back from the Factory Girls' Club. She was expected at a Committee meeting and she went to it late. As she opened the door of the club-room a strong smell of tobacco met her. Michael got up to meet her, and three other men rose to shake hands.

"We came early," said Michael, "as we had a good many things to discuss. Sumner has just come back from seeing the men on strike, and he has some terms to

put before the masters to-morrow, and we want to get them into shape."

Mr. Sumner, a thin, pale young man, with large clear grey eyes, was dressed in rather seedy clerical clothes, and he looked as though he had inextricably knotted his long limbs together, as he sat in a low chair smoking a brown pipe.

"Yes," he said, twisting his body as he spoke. "I think I may do something for the dear fellows; they're almost at the last ditch, but it doesn't do to say so. We must not give in till we have tried all our resources."

"What does Jim Scott say?" said Michael, naming a well-known labor leader.

"Oh, he came down and gave them splendid advice," said Sumner, "if they will only take it."

"I wish they wouldn't hold their meetings at the 'King's Head,'" said Elizabeth. "They haven't got a penny to take home, and yet somehow they find enough to spend and to treat each other with, when they get there."

"I don't believe in that," said Sumner. "Men meet at their club and no fault is found. I don't see why they shouldn't meet at the poor man's club."

"Well, I'm not going to argue that again. If you don't know, you ought to," said Elizabeth, with the freedom of good comradeship.

"She's quite right. You know I don't hold with you a bit there," said a broad-shouldered, dark-complexioned man, who sat at the opposite side of the room. He had a short rough beard and deep-set brown eyes. "I know too well what it all means; there's too much rattling of a box round the streets nowadays to please me. I like the old ways best, hold hard and sit tight. I don't believe in processions and collections. I like to leave those to the Salvation Army and the hospital funds."

Wolfe was in the printing business, a man of few words, much respected by the little group of reformers, strong, uncompromising and straightforward.

The third man was a fair-haired visionary. He had been an accountant, but had lately been a journalist on the staff of a socialistic newspaper. He was now, however, very strongly under Mr. Martin's influence, and, from a somewhat noisy agnostic, he had become a very pronounced churchman, and in consequence of the aggressively antichristian attitude of the paper, had just been obliged to renounce his job.

In the midst of this group sat Father Martin, very silent, looking at one and another, and listening to each. Michael began to explain a situation which he thought threatened labor in the House. He showed how the measure concealed its true purport, and the men fell to discussing how best to arouse their friends and avert the danger.

Miss Osterley seized the opportunity to argue that the measure was really intended to hamper and hinder women workers. She had mounted her favorite hobby, and was off at a gallop, in which the others did not attempt to follow her.

Elizabeth listened for a while, and then went to the door.

"I have promised to go and see Sally's mother," she said. "I daresay I shall find you here when I get back."

Michael followed her into the psasage.

"You are tired," he said, looking at her.

"Not in body, but in spirit," she said.

"Why?" he questioned.

"Only the visit of people from another world," she answered. "I will tell you when I get back. I shall not be long," and then she turned down the court.

The rain had begun to fall, and the streets were clear

at an early hour. In the long narrow court, where Sally's mother lived, all the street doors were shut but the one nearest to the lamp, and a child was sitting on the door-step. She was gazing in front of her at the wet pavement, her elbows on her knees, her face resting on her hands. Her hair, dripping with rain, fell over her ears, and between the heavy curtains her face looked old and serious.

Through the open door behind her she could hear from the first floor sounds of wakefulness, someone walking to and fro, and now and then a woman's voice talking in a loud tone. Once she had heard a soft low cry, and she had started up from her seat listening eagerly, but the woman's voice was all she could hear, so with half a sigh she sat down again on the wet step.

Presently a small boy came swinging along, whistling softly to himself. He did not see the girl till he almost fell over her.

"'Ellow, Sal! Wort yer arter this time a-night? Mover boozed agin?" The child started.

"Oh, is that you, Billy? I've bin wytin' for yer! Somefink's 'appened."

"Wot, father copped?"

"No, 'e's indoors that drunk 'e doesn't know 'esself."

"Waal, out wi' it, wot's up?"

She looked straight at him, and said slowly:

"Mover's gorn and borned a biby!"

The boy looked at her doubtfully for a moment, and then spat through his teeth on the pavement.

"Wot a liar yer air, Sal," he said.

"Billy Catchpole, as sure as my nime's Sally," she said, "mover's borned us a biby, and that's Gawd's truef. Mrs. Maynell's in there, and she can tell yer, ef yer don't believe me."

Billy did not reply, but stood looking down the court.

Again a low cry came from the first floor front, the cry of a little child, and Elizabeth stood in the doorway.

"Is it trew, Mrs.?" he said.

"Yes, Billy, it's quite true. You will be good to her, won't you, because you are strong and big?"

"My Gawd, Sal, a real born biby of our wery own," said Billy, as he sat down on the doorstep beside her, after Elizabeth had gone.

"Yaas," replied Sal, "ourn."

Elizabeth walked slowly back through the rain. The mystery of life was in her thoughts. Why had another child come to share the curse of those already born? Why did God send such tender things into suffering and sin?

She opened the door of the institute, and walked into the committee room. Only Michael and Father Martin remained. She sat down wearily and took off her hat without a word. Michael looked at her interrogatively.

"You're worn out, Elizabeth," he said. "We will be off. You ought to go to bed."

"No, don't go," she said; "I can't sleep yet. Father Martin, do help me," she turned to him almost entreatingly. "Why are children born? Why should more people suffer?" And then she told them of the Catchpole baby, and the visit of the two women that afternoon.

"How can we understand?" said Father Martin. "It is a mystery, like the ether which is bound round us, and which we cannot see, or the giddy pace at which we whirl through space, which we cannot feel. But when our lessons are over in this standard, and we pass on to the next, if we have learned our task, we shall be ready to take our place in the next class and learn more fully."

"What are our lessons?" asked Elizabeth.

"Duty," said Father Martin slowly. "I have come to think that is the great foundation of all true life."

"It's such a hateful word," said Elizabeth. "'Sacrifice,' 'asceticism,' are all picturesque, but 'duty' somehow sounds like Watts' hymns."

"The thing which our hand finds to do," said the old man. "I think it embodies all that was ever great or ever shall be; it's the secret of content, if we only understood it, if we could only go back to simple, natural things. We make life complicated, and then we complain of results which we ourselves have brought about."

"I am sure you won't mind my saying," said Michael, "that I always feel we must blame what is called religion for that; we have so often heard personal sacrifice extolled, that most people forget that it is not the suffering of good people that will help humanity, but their honest work to bring about just conditions for everyone."

"What you want to get back," said Father Martin, "is the right understanding of natural life. Christ came to common people. He taught through what we call common things—things that go to make up the life of every man. The spirit of His teaching is as all-pervading as the sunshine. The world, as we understand the word, isn't Belgrave Square or Limehouse, it's the atmosphere created by each individual, who carries about with him his own world, and in the inner workings of his own heart creates a force for good or evil. Yes, if we could only get rid of preconceived ideas, and go back to the simplicity of children, we should get free from the artificial folly which chokes our growth."

"There is so much cant nowadays about the simple life that I am really weary of it," said Elizabeth. "I know people who will discuss for half an hour whether it is compatible with the simple life to eat mashed potatoes, or whether they must he boiled. It sickens me."

"I don't know," said Father Martin. "When a new idea is in the air it finds all sorts of absurd expressions, and parodies are only possible when a subject is well known. I don't mind that; the trouble is, people can't be simple, and they won't see it is not the way potatoes are cooked which will make them so. It is when the life is in harmony with the will of God, so far as we apprehend it, that the joy of life is understood. Even the Epicurean saw that excess would ruin the happiness he aimed at. No one knew better than the Greek that he must avoid extremes; it is the basis of their philosophy; and this thought of the simple life is the revival of their teaching. It's all right, it will make for good. Only don't fret, Elizabeth; the Hand that holds the world in its course will take care of the little baby, and of you, and me, and the ladies who understood so little of the suffering here, and manage the whole lot of us," said the old man, with one of his rare smiles. "Now good-night. I shall prose on till midnight, and you are tired."

When he had gone Elizabeth turned to Michael and said:

"The dear man has got the heart of a child himself."

"Yes," said Michael slowly, "he has got a great possession—a heart and a faith."

"And you have got both, Michael," said Elizabeth, as he took her hand, "but you are only aware of one."

Elizabeth's regret at the advent of the Catchpole baby was certainly not shared by all the members of its family, for the next day Sally triumphantly carried the baby through the court, pausing every few steps to throw back the corner of a dirty shawl and exhibit the newcomer to her envious friends.

Finally, it was carried to the Catchpole's doorstep, and there all the youth of the neighborhood gathered. Sally, puffed with pride, smiled complacently, remarking

to Polly Jones, who shared a seat on the doorstep with her, "'Taint orfen as my mover do born a biby, but when she does it's somefink like a biby!"

"Gar long, Sal Catchpole!" exclaimed a sharpfaced child who was standing near. "Yer'd fink ter 'ear yer talk nobuddy's mover iver borned a biby but yourn!"

"'Old yer jawr, Liz Smif!" retorted Polly, supporting the horrified Sal.

"All right, Polly Jones," sneered Lizzie, "yer not in wi' Sal fer nofink, I bet!"

"I'll smack yer dirty jawr if I comes arter yer," growled Polly.

"Come an' do it!" shrieked Lizzie, retreating with her face toward the group on the doorstep, and interspersing her remarks with grimaces.

"Yah! Go 'ome an' 'ide yerself," Polly replied. "I'd be 'shimed ter siy nasty fings abart a biby wot carn't speak for itself."

"Whose biby?" demanded Billy, appearing at that minute round the very corner where Lizzie had contemplated making good her escape when she had made the court too hot for herself.

"Yourn!" yelled Polly. "Lizzie Smif siyed wot yer biby——"

She paused, partly because she did not remember what Lizzie Smith had said, partly because there was no need for more words. Lizzie was off, with Billy at her heels.

CHAPTER XIV

THE weary waiting at Cape Town was ended; the Blankshire Yeomanry had been ordered to the front. Troops had been pushing northward all the day. The great "spring forward" had taken place, and men were heartened, for at last they were moving on. It looked like a big thing, they said, and all were eager to get well into the work of war, and have done with it.

It was bitterly cold, and so dark that Eric, who was riding with the subaltern beside him, momentarily expected a fall, as the stones stuck out at right angles from the scrubby rough ground.

Presently the first streaks of light stretched across the distant horizon, pale gleams at first in the velvet purple of the night sky, then broadening into pale gray, and making the low bushes and green shrubs visible, and then, a rare thing in South Africa, with the first light a few birds sang.

"That's a good sound," said Eric, as they turned into a small village, and halted to water horses and to breakfast.

Eric and the subaltern walked to the army bakery, and ate bread and cold meat as they sat in the sun, which had risen to warm and cheer the hearts that needed it so sorely. They fell to talking with the man who ran the place. He told them that his brother kept a little "pub" on the Thames called "The Wedding Bells." How strangely familiar the name sounded. The peaceful spot rose before Eric's eyes. How often after canoeing had he lunched there, and then lay smoking on the grass,

and looking up the long reach of quiet river. How far away it seemed from this land where they rode to-day to find a fight. Then on again, through clear air and dazzling sunshine to the next halt, where many troops were already encamped, a very panorama of war. Great naval five-point-seven guns had arrived, and a sound of bugles was everywhere, and the tramp of the marching of fatigue parties.

Then the orders were to ride on and join a corps of Indian horse, encamped to the northward. They found on arrival that they had already had their first blooding, and were eager to give accounts of the fight. The officers who had been dining were sitting in a knot, and eagerly welcomed the new-comers, as they sat smoking and talking to them, while they ate that most welcome meal.

The man next to Eric had taken out a knife, and was carving the name of Sloane on a piece of board. It was the tombstone of a brother officer, buried near by, and he talked of the fight as he chipped the wood.

Then on for another two miles to join the division on the northeast of the river bed, until the cold night closed round them. All day long it had seemed to Eric he had ridden in a dream. The longing for a big fight was on him; it was the fever which consumed them all, to end the war, he would say; but the sensation was new, and he could not analyze its strength. He only knew it seemed just then to be the object of existence.

The day before at a farmhouse he had sat on the stoop where the troops had rested for breakfast. The women were crying; one young, tall and dark, had reminded him of Elizabeth. She looked at him with the same wide-open eyes brimming with tears which did not fall. The women asked if the troops would burn the farm?

"Our hearts beat fast from fear," said the young woman, who could speak some English. "Oh, do not burn our house."

He got out of his chair and stood up before her, and assured her all was well.

"The white flag is over you," he said, "although all the same, your men fired from here yesterday."

"Ah, we are sick of the war," she said, "sick, sick." Then she spoke of her husband. Was he safe? How she longed to hear! Eric tried to console her. Somehow this straight slim figure brought vividly before his mind the thought of another day when he watched a woman weep. She put her hands over her face and said: "Ah, I am sad. War—war is not pretty to see."

And then he tried to tell her that she must persuade the men to have peace; but the other women had joined her, and the pride of nationality shone in their eyes as they shook their heads. The oldest, withered and shrivelled, with a skin like parchment, said words he could not understand, holding up thin hands that had toiled unceasingly on that lonely farm on the veldt.

"The Tante says the English are mighty, but God is Almighty," explained the younger woman.

And now as in the darkness they still moved on, the woman's words kept ringing in his ears, "God is Almighty." The road showed faint and sand-red, across the gray green of the veldt, and at any moment he expected a long range shot from a distant kopje, or a challenge from the enemy who hung upon their flank.

At last came the end of the interminable march, and the vast camp of two divisions lay stretched out waiting for the day. Eric shivered with the cold. The baggage wagon had not yet come on, and he lay down under a bare covering on very uneven ground, over which in the darkness he stumbled every step he took. In

the almost unbearable cold he looked up into the clear night sky. He thought of the weeping women, and heard their wail until it died away, as he crept into the quiet land of rest. When morning came he woke, wondering where he was. What was he doing there on the hard uneven ground? Then he saw against the first faint light that all round him were little wooden crosses standing very black against the sky, and he knew the meaning of the mounds over which he had stumbled, for he had slept among the graves of the men who had fallen in the fight on that spot, two months ago. And as he looked at the poor little wooden memorials, the remembrance of the Boer woman's words came to his mind.

"It is true," he thought. "War is not pretty to see."

But it was to be a big day, and there was no time for thought. The great five-inch guns were in position. The Guards had already marched out in the dark, and the Blankshire Yeomanry had orders to follow, taking the route of the pass two miles to the north.

Out and on over the vast plains the various detachments were scattered like herds, moving in the distance toward the river-bed; and where the sunlight gleamed there was a glitter of arms, while the air was filled with the rumble of the great gunwheels, and the clatter of cavalry and mounted infantry. The infantry were spread out in open order—wide moving lines. The batteries were clustered into black dots upon the plain, and then at last the ball opened.

"The Boers are giving hell with a Long Tom," said Eric to a brother officer, as he rode up to him; and as he spoke he pointed to where the shells were bursting, and hid the guns in clouds of dust, and then the dull thud of explosion followed.

Eric saw the infantry crawling forward—one long unbroken thread upon the wide plain, without a scrap

of cover. He saw the sharpnel shells burst in the air, and heard the shrill scream of the bullets as they struck the earth. Fascinated by the soft puffs of smoke against the green background, he felt as though he were watching Eton fireworks on the fourth of June again.

Then word came to move on and on, four miles more, until the plain tilted down to the river-bed. Behind and beyond the river were some low kopjes. All over the plain, as by magic, battery after battery of artillery swung up, swung round, unlimbered, and began—bang, bang, bang.

The enemy were in the river, and their guns on the kopjes. The naval guns had opened deafening loud. The whole country ahead simply shouted fire. The man next to Eric was shot dead. He turned his head a moment as he saw him fall, but the hills were ablaze with shells, and he could spare no thought save for this sight of the wrath of war pulverizing man, and the fulfilment of the orders to move on. The Boer shells were coming unpleasantly thick, when up came a British pom-pom.

"Thank God it's ours," called Eric to a lieutenant. "They're all right so, but they're the most cursed things when they're against us."

It soon began its work. The little shells scraped the dust all round the enemy's guns. They made a stand against it for a while, then were in full retreat. It was a splendid moment. The order was given to advance and dismount. The men of the Blankshire Yeomanry fired very coolly. The bullets whistled and bustled round them, but the men's nerves had grown steady, and they seemed no worse to them than big hailstones. It was nearly the end; only stragglers remained. Eric turned to give the order to remount. Something came toward him with a shrieking noise. Was it a blow?

He never knew, only when he woke a doctor was holding him and the blood was pouring out of his mouth.

A voice which seemed to come from an immeasurable distance spoke to him and told him he was better, but the hot blood welled up again and nearly choked him. Was he wounded? Was he dying? The thought flashed through his mind, but everything seemed so far away it scarcely mattered, and his only care was to get air—air. This suffocating weight was hideous. His coat was torn open; the doctor was binding his side. A rumbling, rolling noise was close to his head, then darkness for a moment. Was it death or sleep? And then more choking agony. The doctor's voice again, kind and consoling; then another figure was bending down.

"Poor old chap! Will he pull through?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Thank God! You're going to be all right, Eric, old boy."

The voice was Jack's. He remembered now. He was holding him.

"Your men have done magnificently. Linklater says they did the trick. That last stand was ripping." The doctor had taken Eric's wrist. "He's giving you morphia," said Jack. "You'll be in less pain then."

Eric put his other hand to his throat, and as he did so he felt a bit of chain, and something hanging from it. He held it for a moment, and then he took Jack's hand and whispered:

"Take it; give it——" then darkness.

They had lifted him up, and Jack stood with his hand grasping Eric's legacy, for whom he knew not, while the ambulance jolted slowly over the ant-hills and was lost, a white speck in the distance.

* * * * * * *

The London season had begun, and people were taking amusement furtively. Those who ought to be sad but felt no real oppression from their anxiety, arranged small dinners and went to the play, and flocked to country house parties from Saturday to Monday. Those who were restless and miserable tried vainly to forget, and went about as usual. And others who had no anxiety, and from whom no sorrow was expected, felt it "the thing" to take pleasure surreptitiously, and enjoy small doses of amusement very constantly. But it was disturbing to hear hoarse cries ringing down the streets, and only catchwords like "Great bat—! 'orrible loss of loife!" They were months of tension and suspense, to some almost unendurable, and to all uncomfortable and disquieting.

A week after her visit to Marshom Street Katherine Cliffe was sitting at her dressing-table. The June sunshine filled the room, and the gold brushes and ornaments and glass bottles reflected the light in miniature rainbows, twinkling and changing and glistening, throwing flickering lights on the long wavy masses of fair hair that fell to Katherine's waist, as she sat wrapped in some delicate lace garment awaiting the hairdresser. The man was late, but presently her maid ushered a pale little Frenchman into the room, who was soon busy combing out her bright glossy locks.

"Miladi has good news of Sir John?" he asked, with the respectful familiarity of an habitué of the house.

"Oh yes," answered Katherine, "I had a letter yesterday. He is well, and has seen a lot of fighting. That's why they went, you know," she said, looking at him in the glass.

"Oh, fighting assuredly they will have soon enough. For me, I never could see a man 'urt or killed, but

on s'habitue à tout," he said, slightly shrugging his shoulders.

"Miladi wish her hair dressed 'igh or low?"

"I don't care," said Katherine; "whichever you like best."

"Oh, for that, miladi is always nice. I will do the double knot in the nape of miladi's neck. Miladi 'as many engagements? The season is spoiled, positively spoiled," he went on. "Families are in mourning, and some people are anxious; or if they are not, they want to be thought vere anxious, and only enjoy themselves priveate, vere priveate," and he stretched out his long hands as though to close doors. "Oh, for that, there is some gone not wanted 'ome at all; and there is some gone that 'omes will be desolated if 'e not return." Then, breaking into French, he gave Katherine his views on war, which he felt was incompatible with civilization. She listened with an amused smile. "And zen ze season is spoilt becorse all ze ladies must go out nursing. Ah, *c'est très joli, un bonnet de garde malade, très coquet, mais ça ne fait pas mon affaire.* Miladi 'ere 'ow Lady Bramley ze's gone, and ze Honble. Mrs. Kinhurst is gone, and Miss Hirtwick is gone. Oh, zey are like ze swallows, zey go to find ze flies. I see ze paper zis evening, miladi, a young officer wounded. Vere sad, such a good-looking young man, vere young." And he stopped combing, put the comb in his mouth and felt in his pocket. "Ah, 'ere is ze papare, miladi not seen it?" And he pointed to a crumpled paragraph where the words caught her eye.

"Mr. Errington of the Blankshire Yeomanry severely wounded," and other names followed, but they were of no interest to her. She looked at his name terror-struck. The remembrance of his admiration for her came back very vividly. How strong and well he looked

the day he said good-bye to her at Waterloo. Now he was lying there in some hospital on the veldt.

"Ah, 'e vill be vell nursed; vere fine young man."

Who was nursing him? thought Katherine. The man's words had ceased to interest her. He was intolerably slow. She wanted him gone. Poor Eric! she thought, as she read it again. Could he be——? Oh no; that was horrible.

A deep sigh made her look round. The big tawny collie on the hearth-rug had risen and was stretching himself.

"Laddie!" she called to him. "Poor old beast!" And she felt almost as though the caress must reach his master through the telepathic lines which connect the thought of those who are united by that subtle thing we call sympathy.

Her hair was done and she was dressed. She had telephoned to a man she knew in the War Office to find out all particulars and call her up when she returned home; and she went out feeling tired and listless, caring very little what befell her.

She had never thought that her friendship for Eric could have held so real a place in her life. She pictured him thinking of her, looking at the photograph she had given him. She saw the grave look in his eyes, and the clear curve of his mouth. She remembered the quiet tenderness of his manner, and how white he was when she told him she was engaged to Jack, how he turned away and said quite low, "God bless you." She saw his face again on her wedding-day. She remembered how she had told Jack, and he had said: "Poor old chap! I'm afraid he was hard hit; I'm awfully sorry for him." And now he was in pain alone, where?

She almost wished she had joined the nursing throng. Oh, it was horrible, this war, when it came home to one

like this. She went to her party and stayed till twelve o'clock. Then she came home again, and rang up the telephone, and learned that Eric was at the hospital at ——— and that a cable had been received saying that so far things were going well, but that nothing could really be foretold as to his recovery for another few days.

She went up to her room and wondered how Jack was before she went to bed, and then thought again of Eric before she went to sleep.

For days no more definite information was to be gained. Katherine was a very constant enquirer at the War Office. She could hear no more details, and she consoled herself as best she could with the saw, that "no news is good news." Still she was restless and troubled. Her house was given over to workmen and decorators and she almost hated the sight of the alterations, and felt superstitious as to whether she had brought bad luck by carrying out the designs destined to please Eric.

During these days of stress her thoughts turned to Elizabeth. She imagined her like some calm Madonna soothing the woes of the world. It was a picture that appealed to her, this young and beautiful mater consolatrix amid the sorrows of the slums. She determined to brave the horrors of the neighborhood alone, and to find Elizabeth and enjoy the charm of that atmosphere which had so strongly impressed her imagination.

As good luck would have it, Elizabeth had chosen that afternoon to do her club accounts, so that when the electric brougham glided up to the door she was sitting surrounded by books of all shapes and sizes, puzzling out the small sums which went to make up the very large total for which she was responsible. She had already added the columns again in pursuit of a small sum which would not come into its proper place.

"That loathsome fourpence," she said aloud, "it's so careless of Miss Smith to have put it into the wrong book." Her head ached, and she was just about to begin the weary search again, and it was a real relief to see Katherine in her pretty gown get out of her carriage.

"I've come to see you," she called out while she was still in the passage. "I was fascinated by you, St. Clara. In spite of the ugliness and the gloom, I felt I must see you again, and so here I am," and she rustled into the room. "Are you doing accounts? What a horrible thing," she said, as she saw the pile of little red books. "Why do you waste your time; you should send for Miss Robinson. She would look them all through and give you a balance-sheet. You would never understand it, but it looks splendid. I never could do an account in my life. Two and two always make five with me, and really I have come to the conclusion it is no use. Banks are made to be overdrawn, and as to bills, I always say they breed. You start with two or three, and in a few months you have a pack of them. Poor dear Jack is always rowing about it; but I say that there are many things you must have, which you really never can pay for. Of course railway tickets and anything you lose at bridge and things like that, you have to pay for ready money, and that's bad enough."

She laughed, and showed her white even teeth. Elizabeth loked at her as if she were some tropical bird whose plumage was an artistic delight, but whose note jarred.

"I don't understand," she said. "If one doesn't pay it isn't honest."

"Oh, but one does pay," said Katherine. "Tradespeople charge ever so much more than the things are worth, so that in the end they come out square. I sup-

pose I am extravagant, but there are some things I never can resist, principally hats. I always feel that the way to hell for me will be paved with hats. And just now I'm doing up my house, and the expense is perfectly appalling. I really don't ask what they are going to charge, because if I did it would spoil all my pleasure. Besides, I am doing away with all sorts of unnecessary things, and I am going in for what a friend of mine calls 'restrained beauty.' That means everything fearfully expensive and fearfully simple."

"Are you going to be simple?" said Elizabeth incredulously.

"Oh dear yes," said Katherine. "Everybody is simple now. I dined out last night, and five people out of twenty were simple fooders, ate no meat, and wanted all sorts of things no one ever heard of. It's the most complicated life there is, but it's absolutely the rage."

"Simple lifers seem to have as much trouble in settling their principles as a church council," said Elizabeth laughing. "They all differ, and yet everyone is certain that his dogma is right. If they came here the difficulty would be settled, for most of us belong to the 'do without everything' section. I don't mean that I do, for I have all I want."

"Don't you want beautiful surroundings? I couldn't live a day in this house," said Katherine.

"So I thought when I first saw it," said Elizabeth, "but you get used to anything. I sometimes think I hate it still," she added truthfully, "but there's no help for it, so I make the best of it."

"It must be very wonderful to live for other people," said Katherine. "I wish I could, but we are so hedged in with conventionality, it's impossible to get free, but I wanted to come here to-day to be comforted. I am

anxious about a friend who has been wounded, and anxiety and uncertainty are so hard to bear."

"I am so sorry," said Elizabeth sympathetically, "but I am glad Sir John is safe," she added, hardly knowing what to say.

"Yes, dear old Jack is well. I had a cable to-day. But my friend is a very charming man, so artistic, and with such a wonderfully poetic nature. He is a very dear friend," and Lady Cliffe sighed, and took off her pretty gloves.

"I suppose he was in the Coldstream Guards in the fight at Houtnek? I saw the account last night."

"No," said Lady Cliffe, "he was in the Yeomanry, and he was wounded in a mere skirmish at the Zand River."

Elizabeth looked at her. She felt her heart throb like a hammer. She saw Katherine sitting there with her glistening rings, and her white hands folded on the table, and she longed to seize them and wring the name from her, but she answered in a voice which sounded to her hoarse and unlike her own: "The Blankshire Yeomanry? I know many of the men; they came from my home."

"It is Mr. Errington who is wounded," said Katherine. "I don't suppose you have met him, as he never lived at his place; but he is delightful, and I feel so anxious."

"Have you had news lately?" said Elizabeth. She stood as though she had turned to a stone.

"Oh yes, to-day I heard through the War Office. He is at hospital, and really better. He will be invalided home directly he is well enough."

After her terrible fear Elizabeth felt a great storm rise within her. Who was this woman, that she was able to learn every detail? Had she loved and suffered like herself? Why should she assume that detestable proprietorship? Oh, for freedom to speak, to say all

that Eric had been to her, was to her at that moment. Her pulses throbbed, and the blood rose to her cheeks, but she turned away and looked out into the court to hide the feeling which would betray her.

"He is a perfect dear," continued Katherine, unconscious of anything unusual in Elizabeth's manner. "So musical, with such a glorious voice. Jack is very fond of him, but of course he doesn't the least understand anything artistic—but he has been my friend for years, long before I was married. You have someone out there, haven't you?" she said, as Elizabeth still stood looking out of the window. "Is he all right?"

"Yes, thank you," said Elizabeth dryly. Words seemed to have lost meaning. She only longed to be alone; to be able to think of Eric as hers; to shut out the picture of this beautiful woman who talked of him as though she owned him as a part of the great heritage she already possessed.

Then Katherine began to speak of herself, of her plans for the people at Chillam. She consulted Elizabeth on every point, and the subtle charm of being admired was not lost upon her, and she began to relent.

"You will help me, St. Clara?" she said. "When I am with you I want to be of some use, and you are the only person I know who makes me really want to be good. It has always seemed to me, that everyone I meet who does good work, is horribly dull and dowdy; but you are so pretty, and you would be so much admired. You must be a saint to be buried here, just living for your slummies. You will help me?"

They discussed many plans. Katherine was intelligent as well as sympathetic, and Elizabeth felt that all resentment toward the woman was gone, only a dull aching anxiety lest Eric should, after all, find in her brilliant society something that was missing in her hum-

drum life. But then Katherine was good; she was really fond of Jack, and she told herself the fear was foolish, and when she left at last with many expressions of affection, the predominant feeling in her mind was thankfulness for his safety, and the blessed relief of knowing that he was coming home.

CHAPTER XV

THE gardens at Lentham were celebrated. They had been copied from a fine French design of the seventeenth century. Broad marble steps glittered on the green banks of grass, and white balustrades bordered the terraces which divided the stretches of formal flower-bed. Bays cut to resemble orange-trees stood in long rows, and beneath each terrace was a pergola, giving welcome shade under its cloistered roof of roses.

Beyond the terraces was a large sunk flower garden, gay with geraniums, calceolarias, verbenas and begonias —the garden not of one who loves flowers, but rather designed for a mosaic effect of color; and in the midst of this brilliant parterre marble fountains, with fine groups of bronze figures, stood white and gray and massive, against the green slope which was bordered by beech-trees, where the garden touched the park. The whole was a triumph of artificial taste, carried out in such great proportions as to justify its pretensions.

On a glowing summer afternoon late in August a group of people were sitting on the upper terrace in front of the white Georgian house, with its steps and porticos and balconies. A carpet had been spread on the gravel. They had gathered round a table laden with every conceivable five-o'clock fare. Lady Hornden, tall, handsome and beautifully dressed, pretended to make tea. The work was, however, really accomplished by the servant, who with admirable tact supplied each cup, watching his opportunity to take the tea-pot while the hostess, absorbed in conversation, forgot her duties.

"I often wonder," she was saying, "why we don't stay in the country all the summer; it's positively insensate to spend such months in London in the really heavenly time of the year. Don't you think so, Sir James?" she said, turning to an elderly man, who had sunk into a chair beside her.

"It's delightful to-day, in this place and at this hour, but I always feel that there is something terrible in the country when one is alone. It is like being with a silent, observing friend, whom you feel is taking stock of your shortcomings. The hour the French call *crépuscule* is appalling. You may have the most marvellous cook in the world, the deathly stillness of the country when you are alone would take away your appetite."

"I am not at all sure I agree with you," said Lady Hornden. "I remember a summer I spent here the year I was a widow. It was wonderfully soothing. Of course I was in deep mourning. Dear Mr. Fordwick, do have something to eat. Won't you have some raspberries? Help Mrs. Rodney; she has none. I used to sit here looking out over the garden, evening after evening, and the peace was delicious. I mean, of course, in my great sorrow. Oh, how well I remember it! Put some hot water in the tea-pot, Shorter," she said to the groom of the chambers, who was hovering near her, attentive and imperturbable. "How I used to look out and wonder what the world could hold for me, and what my child's fate would be."

"And how soon she could decently get back to London," said Anne Rodney in a low voice to the man who sat next to her.

"Well, it's lucky for us you didn't go on dreaming, but woke up and came back to life. The world would certainly have been poorer if you hadn't given dinners which everyone who has ever eaten them must remember,"

said Sir James. "I have always said that the *crême de volaille* which your cook invented wrapped round quails is the best thing I have ever eaten of the sort. Ah, it's perfect!" he said, half closing his eyes as though he saw a creation of great beauty. "And his *caneton Voisin* far better than Voisin's, upon my honor it is."

"Dear Sir James, you are so kind," said Lady Hornden, "and of course you are the best judge in Europe. Oh, everybody knows that," she added, as he made a deprecatory gesture.

"It makes me miserable to see the way good things are positively ruined by most cooks," he continued. "'Pon my word, I dine out, and half the time, with a menu a quarter of a yard long, there is absolutely nothing edible. Food for the million is the destruction of our English cooking, but ——"

"Tea, dear Mr. Farningham?" said Lady Hornden to the tall limp man in gray who had just come up to the table. "Fresh tea, Shorter. I can't allow you to drink this· tannin is absolute destruction to the digestion."

"How heavenly this is," said Mr. Farningham, sinking into a vacant chair on the other side of Lady Hornden. "As I came up the terrace you made a beautiful picture, a group by Watteau or Boucher; those lovely colors"—and he touched the pale lavender lisse gown in which Lady Hornden was dressed—"and Mrs. Rodney in that note of blue against the green grass; it is perfect," and he helped himself to *foie gras* as well as egg sandwiches.

Sir James looked across at him, and said:

"It is positive profanity to eat tea when you are going to have a dinner cooked by the most perfect cook in England."

"Am I?" said Mr. Farningham. "Well, I daresay I shall manage both," and he laughed. "Where is

Lady Cliffe?" he said, looking round the table. "Is she taking care of the invalid? How delicious for him."

Mr. Farningham was sometimes unfortunate in his remarks, and Lady Hornden looked annoyed.

"I don't know; he is resting, I suppose, and Katherine had a headache. Poor darling! She worries a great deal about Jack, and they are expecting more fighting. Has Lady Cliffe had tea?" she said, turning to the man servant.

"Her ladyship sent for it to the little summer-'ouse in the rose gardin," said the man, and then he added: "And Mr. Errington was taking his with her ladyship."

"Very sensible," said Sir James diplomatically; "his wheeled chair is difficult to get up and down these banks." And the conversation turned to other channels.

After tea Mrs. Rodney, walking in the pergola with Mr. Fordwick, said, as she smoked her cigarette:

"How silly it is of dear Lady Hornden to keep up this absurd farce about Katherine and Jack. I never saw a woman more engrossed with any man, or a man more head over ears in love with a woman. She has countenanced everybody else's little affairs for years. Why is she to pose in this way about her daughter?"

"Because she is really a very sentimental woman, and she has settled that Katherine is to be a model wife to the man she chose," said Mr. Fordwick, with a little bitterness in his tone.

"Model wives don't exist," said Anne, "except in Brixton or Clapham. They are as extinct as the dodo in London."

"Our London," said Mr. Fordwick, "is a very little bit of the world."

"Oh, of course, you look at things from a politician's point of view, the empire on which the sun never sets,

and all that sort of bunkum; but I mean the world I know, and live in, and frankly love," said Anne. "I don't pose, whoever else does."

"No, you don't," said the young man; "but still you know, there is such a thing as the pose not to pose."

They were soon joined by Mr. Farningham.

"What a pity dear Lady Cliffe *affichés* this sort of thing so much," he said. "I'm really sorry for Lady Hornden. Just now, too, it's not good taste, with the war and all the chances it brings going on, and the ill-natured way people talk."

"You mean," said Anne, "that people will think she hopes to hear Jack's dead?"

"Oh, Mrs. Rodney, I never said that. I have known Lady Cliffe ever since she was a baby."

"No," said Anne, "but you implied it; I know you're an old friend of the family, and privileged, no doubt."

Mr. Farningham afterward said he liked most people, but Mrs. Rodney was coarse, and he never could bring himself to like a coarse woman. And Anne Rodney, speaking of him later to Mr. Fordwick, said:

"How I hate that old cat; he comes and laps up all the scandal, and then scratches us and purrs all the while."

The rose garden was bathed in the afternoon sun. The second bloom of roses was particularly good, and the entrance to the little summer-house was nearly smothered with Laurette Messimé, and a maze cloud of William Allan Richardson climbed in riotous confusion over the roof. A small tea-table was spread at which Lady Cliffe sat, becomingly clad in a simple white washing gown, looking particularly slight and girlish.

In a wheeled chair opposite to her sat Eric. His face was very white and his features pinched. Pain had undoubtedly set its seal upon him. The waxen

color and the evident shortness of breath clearly showed that the lungs had not yet recovered.

"It would have been a deal nicer at Chillam," said Katherine. "There would have been no tiresome visitors, and we should have just done as we liked; but mama suddenly took into her head that it was not proper. Jack would have loved you to go."

Eric looked across at her. He wondered that she should speak of Jack. Surely she must know what he felt for her. Why bring Jack into the question at all? But he said:

"You know how I should have loved it; still, I daresay Lady Hornden is right. I mean she is right to think of you. My life is broken, it does not matter what happens to me. But you are a treasure to be guarded," and he put his hand on hers as she held it out to lift something off the table.

"Guarded—guarded? I am tired of hearing that," said Katherine. "When I was a little girl I was guarded always; no play with other children, because I was guarded from risk of infection or unsuitable companions. When I came out, just the same thing, guarded against an unsuitable marriage, and I was guarded with a vengeance; mama kept a hawk's eye on me; I had no will of my own," and Katherine sighed.

"What made you marry Jack?" Eric asked suddenly.

"Dear old Jack," said Katherine, "he asked me to marry him, and he was the first man who ever spoke to me in a sort of manly upright way. He was so strong and straight," and Katherine looked up at the long rose-covered way under the terrace, and for a moment she wavered, and felt that Jack would tell her she was not "playing the game."

But Eric was persistent. He bent forward and looked into her eyes.

"Tell me," he said, "tell me the real truth. Do you love him? Is his step the music that sets your heart beating and pulses tingling? Do you feel you want to be on a desert island with him, and see him only and no one else? That's love; the only thing that any dare call by that name."

Katherine leant back in her chair and was silent.

"Do you, do you?" persisted Eric.

"No, not in that way. I've been married more than two years, and of course—now—no, I never did feel all that. You know the proverb, '*Un qui baise et l'autre qui tend la joue.*' I suppose I have held out my cheek."

"Of course you have, and he has worshipped you, because he has seen the wonderful thing that is his," said Eric quickly. "But I think if the cheek had been held out to me I should have so kissed it that I should have won more than passive love. I could fancy a man who laid his whole life at your feet winning from you all the passion of love of which you are capable, for you have a mine which has never yet been discovered—glowing treasure no one has ever owned. Katherine, do you know it?"

His face was flushed and his eyes sparkled. His whole being seemed to have gathered strength. As he spoke he took her hand and held it tightly, grasping it with his long feverish fingers.

She made no answer. She felt half frightened, half pleased, and yet she had not intended he should speak to her so directly.

"Do you know," he went on quickly, "how I love you—have loved you, as I have never loved another woman? Do you know how I thought of you out on the veldt at night, and that it seemed to me you looked down on me like one of the unattainable stars that shone so resplendent and so far away, so far above me? And

when I came back a weary burden, only half living, how you made me long for life—life to throw at your feet, to be only a slave to your happiness. Do you know it and understand it all, Katherine?"

"Eric, Eric," said Katherine, standing up, "don't, please don't; you must not tell me. We were so happy, and if you say it all, it is not fair to Jack. Let us keep it as a sacred thing."

"Then you do understand it—feel it; oh, my love!"

Eric took again the hand that hung by her side, and covered it with kisses. She stooped and laid the other on his shoulder.

"Eric, don't make me say it, only let us be happy together while we can."

The long shadows were lying across the quiet garden, and the faint mist of the late summer evening was beginning to rise, when a nurse crossed the lawn, and coming toward the summer-house said:

"I think Mr. Errington ought to go in, my lady. Don't you think so, sir? The damp is rising now."

"Yes, nurse," said Lady Cliffe quickly. "You are right." And it was with almost a feeling of relief that she watched the wheeled chair pushed toward the house.

"How puzzling life is," she thought, as she walked slowly after it. "Why should the wrong people care so much? Jack cares; but lots of women would have done as well, whereas Eric has an affinity which he could find in no one else; a passion; a devotion never satisfied before, and what can I give in return? I won't let him talk again as he has done to-day," she thought; "but of course we can understand each other without words."

And then she dressed for dinner, and came down, looking radiant, with eyes that shone as though lit by

an inward flame, and with the far-away look and the absent manner of one who has seen a vision.

Lady Hornden was seriously disturbed. She did not want Katherine to make a fool of herself in Jack's absence. She had no very high ideals of conduct, and she was always glad that "the right people should meet" at her house. But a maternal instinct made her wish to protect Katherine, and her intuition told her that Eric would be selfish and vain. She remonstrated with Katherine to no purpose—she found she could make no lasting impression.

"I don't see," she said to her mother, "why you want me to be different to other people. You never make any fuss when Mrs. Rodney meets Jimmy Blacker, or Mary Winnington has Arthur Warley as her best friend. Why am I to have no fun?"

"Because," said Lady Hornden, "you're a fool, Katherine. You will make a tragedy of a thing which ought to be a mere passing amusement, and Eric is absurd. No man need look as though he were going to be executed directly you talk to anyone else, and somehow he is more compromising with all his die-away airs than any man I ever met. I wish to goodness he would get well and go away."

"Jack's very fond of Eric," said Katherine.

"What has that got to do with it?" said her mother. "Do you suppose Jack, with all his straight-laced principles, would tolerate him if he thought he was making love to you? You know very well he would be just the sort of man to send the woman he loved to the right-about if he thought she was not keeping square. He has the most high-flown ideas about honor and women and all that sort of thing. When he comes back again if you choose to have Eric as a hanger-on and he does not compromise you, but behaves sensibly, that is another

matter; but, believe me, if Jack gets wind of all this while he is away, there will be a fearful row when he gets home. I know what I am talking about. Of course these good men are splendid and faithful, but you can't fool about with them, and Eric has got no common sense. I loathe artistic men, they're always mean."

Katherine tried lamely to defend Eric, but deemed it prudent to argue no more, and settled to go back to London as soon as she conveniently could. Eric must get rooms, and then she could see him at her own house and avoid constant comment. The decorator had finished his work and demanded her presence, she told her mother.

And so in September, when London was comparatively empty, she returned, and Eric, who was making good progress, and could walk a little, took rooms off St. James's Street, where an excellent manservant replaced the services of a nurse.

The changes in Katherine's house were a constant occupation to both, and he was enchanted at this evidence of the ascendency which his mind and taste had acquired over hers, even at a time when he had scarcely suspected it.

During the pleasant early autumn days they drove together to Kew Gardens, motored to Hindhead and Haslemere, read together and talked endlessly. Eric had not again openly spoken of his love for her, but there was a tacit understanding between them, which perhaps fed the flame of their affection more effectually by reason of the restraint laid upon it. As each day passed their plans were made only with a view of being together, and the quiet hours of rest and reading in the harmonious surroundings of the beautiful house had all the charm of domesticity, and none of its prosaic responsibilities.

Katherine had divided her mind into compartments, and was careful not to open those which might reveal anything to disturb her peace. She sometimes had an uneasy feeling that if she were to search deep enough she might come upon a hidden hope, stowed in the farthest recess of her heart, that everything might remain as long as possible just as it was, and she knew that this involved an indefinite delay in Jack's return. She tried to ignore the existence of this region, to avoid introspection, and to drift on day by day without looking forward.

Her correspondence was her greatest difficulty. She was never a good letter-writer, and therefore the length of her letters did not vary very much; but it became more and more impossible to reiterate hopes that the war would speedily end and that soon Jack would be home again. So she took refuge in telling him that "all was well," that he need have no anxiety about her, and that she was so glad (with many dashes) to hear he was "getting on all right," that the war was "horrible," and wasn't he "tired, poor dear, of being so uncomfortable?" (more dashes). Once she added a postscript to say she had seen Eric and that he was nearly well, but she closed her letter quickly and did not re-read it, and afterward wished she had not written Eric's name.

Poor Jack used to take these letters out as he lay on the veldt, and try and piece them together and read between the lines all he wanted to find, but the task was not easy.

CHAPTER XVI

ELIZABETH had seen in an evening paper the fact that Eric was invalided home, and had arrived in London, and then a great curtain of silence had fallen, and she knew nothing of his health, his movements, or his plans. They were hard days. Michael had gone on a visit of inspection to some German factories, and she had been for a few weeks to stay with her uncle, Lord Oxenham. The old man was alone, and glad to have his niece to keep him company during the early days when cub-hunting had not begun, and he had no shooting to fill his time.

"I didn't ask your aunt, my dear," he said, much to Elizabeth's relief. "She is a good woman, but a bit fussy, and I thought we should get on better without her."

So Elizabeth lay under the big elm-trees and read and dreamed, and revelled in the large cool rooms and the sense of leisure and quiet, which were a blessed contrast to the crowded court and baking streets; but early in September she told her uncle that she must return.

He could see no urgency, but she insisted. Cub-hunting had begun, and he was already much absorbed by the performances of his young hounds, and so with some ineffectual remonstrance from him, she returned to London, where the heat was overpowering, and the smells well-nigh intolerable.

She went out into the court to find Billy Catchpole nursing Louisa. That was the name given to the baby. Sally, by right of her superior years, was chief nurse, but on those rare occasions when she was obliged to put

in a day at school to avoid a summons, her duties fell on Billy. It went sorely against Sally's inclination to trust him with such a charge, but there was no help for it. Mrs. Catchpole said she was too busy to be bothered with the child, and there was no one else but Billy to mind her when Sally was away. So reluctantly Sally would depart for school, and harrow herself all the way by thoughts of what might await her arrival at home.

Billy's character was none of the best. He had been known to doss out for a week at a time. If the mood to roam came on while the baby was in his care, she knew that as likely as not, rather than stay at home, he would take the baby with him. He might fight with the baby in his arms; it was his boast that he could beat any boy of his own size, and some bigger, with one hand. He might be run over in the street. Sally's mind had no rest till Louisa was back in her arms.

Before the appearance of the baby, Sally had been the best singer in the court. When she had a penny to spare,she laid it out on a song-book, and from it she sang the fashionable ballads of the day; but Elizabeth noticed that, by some strange sense of the fitness of things, she never sang these ballads to Louisa. There was evidently not one she considered fit for her ears, so she confined herself to a Salvation Army chorus, called "The Lion of Judah," and a hymn she had picked up at a mission hall. And she marvelled still more at the child when she saw that Polly, with a voice not half so good as Sally's and a bad memory for last verses, had taken her place as singer to the court; but Sally shook her shaggy head, and seemed to think she could afford to permit it, for her hymns and choruses were, she believed, charms to ward off evils from Louisa.

Billy, who was lacking in all religious feeling, jeered at Sally's piety, and sang to Louisa the only street song

he knew, which was "Her golden hair was hanging down her back," and the baby opened her eyes and rolled her helpless little head, and appeared to prefer it to Sally's hymns.

Elizabeth stood on this sultry day and watched Billy nursing the baby. His quick bright eyes were following the movements of half a dozen urchins who were playing pitch and toss, and his little black hands clasped the ragged bundle as he rocked it to and fro on his knee, which was showing a grimy pink through his torn trousers.

Presently he caught sight of Elizabeth, and with a broad smile he looked up, and said:

"'Ullo, Mrs. Maynell." It was the usual greeting of the children of the court.

"How's baby, and Sally?" said Elizabeth.

"Sally's 'elping mover," he said. "Ain't no school; it's 'olidays. Lots on 'em's gorn into the country."

"Would you like to go?" said Elizabeth.

Billy looked up quickly. He had heard so much about it from the boys who had been there. They had told him of the thousands of fields where everyone might play, and the woods full of bears and gipsies, and wild horses that you might ride if you caught them, of the fish they had seen jumping out of the river, and worms going about at night with lamps on their heads.

"Just think as I should!" he said, as the remembrance came quickly like a passing panorama.

"I'll try and get you a ticket," said Elizabeth, and left Billy in a state of bewildered happiness.

She walked on a while to see some of her friends and some sick folk who were caged up in their horrible little rooms, which smelt worse than usual. And then, with a sort of despair, she turned her steps to the great thoroughfare, walked about a mile, and then down some

more narrow streets, and stood before a gaunt red-brick house, with many windows and no curtains. She was presently sitting in Father Martin's study. He was bending over a large writing-table, in his small writing-room, but got up, stretching out both hands to greet her.

"I'm glad you're back. Sit down," he said, clearing a chair of a pile of books and papers. "Are you better for your rest? I have often thought of you in the cool green of the summer woods. Yes, it's quite right,

> If Eden be on earth at all
> 'Tis that which we the country call.

And yet it is not Eden we are seeking; it's only external, after all. The kingdom of heaven is within you. Now tell me about yourself." And he looked at her with his kind penetrating eyes.

The look of weariness on her face did not escape him, but he knew too much of human nature to forestall a confidence.

"Yes, the country was heavenly," said Elizabeth, "but——" and she hesitated.

"You wanted to take all the world with you," he said.

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "I believe the worst form of selfishness is that which wants to make others happier in order to enjoy one's self more fully," and she laughed.

"I wish to God people were usually affected with that form of selfishness," said Father Martin. "But Elizabeth," he said, leaning his head on his hand, "you are discovering the oneness of the human family, that happiness and sadness which affect one creature really affect all; but I want you to find out something else which changes life still more completely: that you and I and everyone are working out some great beneficent plan, evolved not by a Creator who plays with us like

pawns, and moves us to suit His game; but that we are a part of Himself, and indispensable to His great end, and that as we understand this we intelligently lend ourselves to His schemes, and co-operate with Him; and the more this sense of our union with God develops, the more true understanding we have of what the redemption of man really is."

Elizabeth listened.

"Things we can do seem so poor and so tiny and so insignificant," she said.

"Nothing is insignificant," said Father Martin. "The builder puts brick upon brick, whether he is going to build a tenement for the herded poor in Whitechapel, or a palace for the doges in Venice. It's design which signifies, the ultimate idea. You are putting your work into the right design. Have patience," he added gently.

"Darwin says the earth-worms transform the world, but they don't know they are doing it," said Elizabeth, "only wriggling blindly through their work. I find it so hard to wriggle," and she laughed, but her eyes were full of tears.

"Not blindly," said Father Martin, "not blindly. There is the 'light that lighteth every man.' The great personal love, beyond which we can never go, and beautiful human affection, which is a very integral gart of it." And he looked at her and thought of Michael.

"Human affection? I wish we could be born without it. That is what makes life hard and bitter and sad," said Elizabeth, and she got up to go.

"Was that the reason she came to work in the slums?" thought the old man. But the conversation was abruptly interrupted. Miss Osterley rushed into the room. She had scarcely time to give a breathless greeting to Elizabeth when she produced from under her arm a roll of papers.

"I have come, Mr. Martin, to ask your signature.

A most atrocious thing is being done, and some of us are getting up a timely protest. I can't explain the details before Elizabeth, but it's a real disgrace to our civilization, and the Home Office should be approached without delay."

Father Martin took up the long paper, and as he read his brows knit, and a look of grave care came into his face.

"Of course I will sign the sense of this," he said, "but I confess I don't like the form."

"It's no use watering it down," said Miss Osterley, "we must be plain, or else these men don't understand us. We can't take a pair of gloves to suit the fastidious," she said, eagerly looking at him.

"I will go through it with you presently." He shook hands with Elizabeth, who was prepared to go, and opening the door, he said to her as she passed, "Courage and faith and patience, these three things I shall pray for, for you."

"Thank you," she said. "I need them all."

Then he returned to his table with a sigh, and listened while Miss Osterley poured out the vials of her wrath upon man in general, but governing man in particular.

* * * * *

October came, with cool air, bright mornings and golden afternoons drawing suddenly to a close, as the violet distance changed into grey mist, a time of diffused sunlight and quivering shadows, the beginning of the year's old age, when careful preparation must be made for the day when work will cease in rick and barn, the gathering in of all that has been, the setting of the world's house in order for what is still to come.

Day after day Katherine took Eric through the deep lanes of Surrey, out over the heather fields of Sussex, across the sweep of the Hampshire downs, traversing

miles as the motor flew. Often they would sit for hours, speaking scarcely a word, content to be together, and to watch the constantly changing beauty of the autumn world.

The very sense of his presence beside her seemed to hold Katherine in a spell; she felt she had all she wanted, except one thing, the permanence of her happiness. How could she live when these days were over —when Eric was well again, for his strength was returning to him fast? But she tried to forget that such a time must come, and to live only in the sensuous pleasure of the sunny present.

"What a sense of preparation there is everywhere now," said Eric to her, as they passed the farmhouses set in golden ricks, and the apple orchards where the sunlight flickered through the branches, making a network of shadow on the grass, and touching the scarlet and yellow apples which lay in heaps beneath the trees. "Doesn't it all seem to speak of fulfilment and success, the ingathering of the world's work?"

"No, not to me," said Katherine. "It seems to me to be inexpressibly sad, for even the sunshine is only the light of a dying summer. Some people like old people; to me they are horrible. I hope I never may be old; there seems to me to be no satisfaction in remembering happiness; it can only bring a mad wish to have it all over again."

"Do you think so?" said Eric. "I think I have seen old people who were happy."

"Only while they were not sure they were really old," said Katherine. "Don't let's talk of it; old age is always hideous; I can't bear it. The beginning of the years of old age, when the beautiful days are over, and when the joy of it all is gone," and she shuddered as she wondered how soon that would be.

The weather suddenly changed and relentless rain set in. The country was blotted out in mist, sodden and forlorn, and Katherine wondered what could fill the wretched afternoon, and remembered Elizabeth. She had not thought of her lately, but with the recollection, she determined to take Eric to Marshom Street. It would be a new experience, this meeting with St. Clara. She ordered her electric brougham, and as she stood after luncheon in the hall, drawing on her long gloves, she said:

"I am going to take you for a new drive to-day. We can't motor into the country, so I am going to take you to the slums."

"Good heavens! How horrible! What have you and the slums got to do with each other? I have a horror of smells, and I never could get up any enthusiasm for dirty people."

"Ah, but I'm not going to take you to dirty people, but to see a saint who lives in a court, in order to help them by being there."

"I hate saints, too," said Eric. "It's only when a woman has lost her looks and her youth, that she takes to good works to make the scales balance by throwing in a few good deeds. I know the sort of people. Can't we go to Dowdeswell's galleries to see those heavenly drawings of Miss Blackwell's instead?"

"You wait until you have seen my saint," said Katherine.

"Oh, I know the whole tribe," said Eric, "beastly bores, in bad clothes, who are always trying to reform somebody else."

"Wait," said Katherine laughing.

The brougham made its silent passage through the mazes of mean streets lined with costermongers' barrows and crowded with dirty people, until it came to Marshom Street, and stopped at the corner house.

Elizabeth was visiting in the court. She had sent Martha out with some soup to a sick woman, and the small person known as "the girl" opened the front door, and looked up into the face of the liveried servant who stood before her.

"Miss Maynell was out, but she didn't believe as she would be long gone."

Katherine, who heard the message, did not wait for it to be repeated, but got out of the brougham, crossed the muddy pavement and beckoned Eric to follow her. They entered the little parlor and sat down.

"Good heavens!" said Eric. "This room stamps your saint. How could any individual be found to live in such unmitigated ugliness?"

"Wait," said Katherine again.

A few photographs were on the mantelpiece and a great many books on the shelves. These were the only additions Elizabeth had made, but Eric did not trouble to get up and look at them, but sat thinking how pretty Katherine looked, even with so squalid a background.

Presently the front door opened and Katherine went into the passage to meet Elizabeth.

"Dearest St. Clara," she cried, "what ages since I have seen you! I had to come to-day; I felt I must not lose sight of you, and I have brought you a visitor."

Elizabeth looked tired and pale. There had been a great deal of sickness in the district after the hot weather. She was genuinely glad to see Katherine; it seemed like a breath of air from a wider plane, and the thought had sprung up in her heart that she might get news of Eric. So the color came into her face as she took her hand, and Katherine kissed her cheek. She was so sorry to hear there was someone with her. She was afraid she might not speak of Eric, but Katherine took her arm and drew her into the parlor.

The afternoon light was dim, as the day was dark, and the tall figure of the man sitting against the window got up as they came in. Eric recognized Elizabeth a moment before the consciousness of his presence had reached her.

"Great Scott!" he thought. "What will she do? Will she say she knows me, or will she not?"

He stood up, tall and hesitating. Elizabeth looked for a moment, then the fact came flooding up round her, and she felt as though she was losing hold of real life.

What had he come for? was the first thought in her mind; but Katherine's words quickly dispelled any illusion on that score.

"St. Clara, I have brought my great friend, Mr. Errington, to see you. He is devoted to everything artistic, and I wanted him to see that a jewel is always beautiful, even in a horrible setting. Mr. Errington, this is St. Clara—Miss Maynell."

The pause that followed seemed an eternity. Elizabeth did not look at him, but she bowed toward the place where he stood, and turned to Katherine.

Eric's first feeling was one of relief, and then he resented the reception.

"So she no longer cares a button," he thought. "How like a woman!"

Katherine was disappointed. She felt Elizabeth's want of courtesy. She ought to show more consideration to her guests. But she went on talking to her, trying from time to time to draw Eric into the conversation.

"By the way," she said, "you come from the same country. Miss Maynell's home is at Ilbury," turning to him. "Only, I suppose, as you never lived there, you could not have met; but I expected you knew his old uncle, didn't you?" she said, smiling encouragingly at Elizabeth.

"I have met him." Then a dead pause. Eric felt as though his tongue was parched and as hard as a parrot's. He tried in a harsh tone to make some remarks about that part of London. He did not address Elizabeth directly, but talked through Lady Cliffe, as though she occupied the chair.

Elizabeth sat very white and still.

"She must have had some sorrow," thought Katherine, and then she said: "Mr. Errington is invalided home; he was badly wounded. You remember I told you. Have you good news of your friend in South Africa?" she asked hesitatingly.

"He is dead," said Elizabeth shortly. She felt it was true as far as she was concerned.

"How shocking!" said Katherine. Of course that fully accounted for Elizabeth's extraordinary manner. The sight of another man who had safely returned was too much for her. She took Elizabeth's hand and held it. "I am so sorry," she whispered.

Eric looked out of the window. Katherine rose to go, and Eric stood up by her side.

Never before had such a burning anger possessed the soul of Elizabeth. Had he come to insult her? Had he come here with Lady Cliffe to show her the woman for whom he had left her? She hated him as women only hate those whom they really love.

"I may come again, dearest," said Lady Cliffe, as she kissed her on both cheeks. "I am so awfully grieved. May I come and talk it over?"

"No, don't," said Elizabeth. "I have not time, indeed I haven't," she answered almost passionately.

Katherine looked bewildered, kissed her again and turned to go. As she passed out of the door Eric paused an instant, and said in a hurried whisper:

"I didn't know, believe me, I didn't, or I would not

have come without your permission. You know that, don't you?"

Elizabeth made no answer, held open the door and let him pass out, and then turned and flung herself down dry-eyed and buried her head in her hands.

"So that is the end," she said—"the end." And her heart ached till it was physical pain.

"You mustn't judge her," said Katherine to Eric as they drove away. "She's not a bit like that usually; it must be the death of her friend. She seems terribly cut up."

"Does she?" said Eric vaguely, and began to talk of other things.

That evening Eric dined at Hill Street. A wood fire burned in the grate, for the evening was still chilly and they were glad to find it when they came up from the dining-room. A shaded electric light stood on the table near Katherine's chair. The rest of the room was in shadow, lit only by the flickering light from the fire. Katherine, dressed in a long white gown-tea, bent over her work, and Eric sat smoking in a chair on the other side of her table.

The room was filled with the scent of hothouse flowers brought from the conservatories at Lentham, and Eric leaned back with a sense of special enjoyment.

By-and-by he went to the piano and began playing Tannhauser. The magic of the music possessed him, but now and then he would pause and call to her:

"Don't you remember how this goes?" and hum a bar and play again. "And this—and this?" and he played on. "Why, in that song, there is the whole passion of the human heart."

Katherine rose and leaned over the piano. He did not look at her; he seemed to see nothing. By-and-by he fixed his eyes on her with an eager, hungering look, but still played on.

"Dank deiner Huld gepriesen sei dein Lieben!"

"Ah, that's when it comes," he said, "that cry of the heart!"

"Ich lass' dich nicht! Du darfst nicht von mir ziehen!"

And then he turned suddenly from the piano, and put out his arms and folded her in them, raining kisses on her lips and throat.

"You know it. Say you know it, the wonderful glory of love. My darling, my fair one, look at me, look at me. Say just one word, 'I love you!' "

Katherine felt blinded, bewildered. His arms held her. Her whole being was overwhelmed by the torrent of his passion.

"You know," she murmured, "you know. Oh, don't blame me. I can't, I am helpless. What can I do? Yes, yes, I love you, but don't ask me any more. Let me go. Even though it is pain, I must not stay."

"But your heart says stay here, in the place appointed for you from the beginning of the world."

"Eric, Eric," she whispered, putting her face close to his, "it is; I believe it is the only place where I could find the fullness of love, but I have forfeited it. Don't let me forget that I want to be straight. Oh, help me Eric," and with a sort of desperation she wrenched herself from him and left the room.

Upstairs she flung herself on her bed. She felt his kisses on her face, and the pressure of his arms; the charm of his whole being invaded her; then, as she grew calmer, she got up and walked about the room. A picture of Jack was on her dressing-table. She did not want it there, nor did she like to move it. By-and-by, when her excitement subsided, it seemed as though she had lost something. She felt she was not, as she had been an hour ago, fearless before all the world. There was something to hide, and she was ashamed.

CHAPTER XVII

LADY HORNDEN had come to London to get her autumn clothes, and also because she was really anxious about Katherine. She was standing in her bedroom in Park Lane, surrounded by bandboxes, which her maid was feverishly unpacking.

"Please, my lady, there's a person from Madame Lili with hats," said the servant.

"Tell her to wait," answered Lady Hornden, "and I'm expecting some from Madame Albert. Tell them to leave them on approbation. Now go on, Henriette, make haste and let me see if these things are fit to wear."

She tried on gown after gown, as Henriette released them from the network of tapes with which they had been secured by the careful French packer in the great Parisian house from whence they came. Lady Hornden stood before the long looking-glass.

"The sleeves are not right," she said critically, looking at herself. It would have been difficult to define where there was a fault on account of the apparent absence of that part of the gown.

"Look, Henriette, thou seest this velvet should have been two inches lower. *Cela m'engonce*," she said in French. "The lines are bad."

"My lady is wrong," said the maid, "*c'est parfait, c'est d'un chic. Le corsage est ravissant! Miladi est moulee.*"

"Of course," said Lady Hornden, "so it ought to, coming from Vendré, but there should be no fault, and thou must be blind not to see the *decolletage* is wrong."

She stood there, tall and good-looking, absorbed in the clothes, when a knock called the maid to the door. A telegram lay on the silver tray the manservant held. She took it to Lady Hornden, who laid it on her dressing-table, while once more she twisted round, holding her handglass to take another critical look at the back.

"*Il demande s'il y a une reponse, miladi*," said Henriette.

Still absorbed in the scrutiny, she held out one hand for the telegram and tore it open. As she read it she gave a cry and sat down suddenly on the stool at her dressing-table, with the pink paper in her lap.

"I deeply regret to inform you that among the list of casualties just received from South Africa is the name of Sir John Cliffe, who was killed in the action at Diamond Hill. Please convey news to Lady Cliffe. List will be published to-night.—Rainsbury."

"My God!" said Lady Hornden, very white. "How horrible!" And then her thoughts flew to Katherine. How would she take it? Would she marry Eric at last, after all the trouble she had taken to prevent it? Dear old Jack—the very best man she knew—dead. Her mind was in a tumult. Katherine must be told at once, before the papers came out. It was one o'clock; there wasn't a minute to be lost.

"Order the brougham," she said in an unsteady voice. "Bring me some brandy and soda," she added feebly. Her strength was going; her knees trembled. She sat there, white as death, with her evening gown on in broad daylight.

"Quick, Henriette, get me out of this; give me a black gown, anything, quick! I have got to get to Lady Cliffe."

Never had she dressed with such haste. Henriette read the telegram as it lay on the table when she went to fetch a buttonhook to put on miladi's boots, and redoubled her haste, working with quick sympathetic fingers to get her ready.

"*C'est accablant!*" she muttered to herself, as Lady Hornden left the room. "*Mon dieu! Il etait si bien,* Sir John."

Jennings was waiting in the hall; she stopped and spoke to him.

"I have had very bad news. Sir John has been killed. I am going to Lady Cliffe; it will break her heart."

The man stood very upright, with his arms hanging straight to his sides. A look of real concern came into his face.

"I am very sorry, my lady, very sorry indeed. Sir John was a gentleman. I am very sorry."

She drove to Hill Street. The short distance never seemed so long, the stepping horses never so absurdly slow.

Was Lady Cliffe in? She waited feverishly for the servant to cross the pavement.

"No, my lady," said the footman.

Lady Hornden called the servant to speak to her at the carriage door. When had she gone out? When would she be back? Where was she? The questions came crowding out, bewildering the man. He looked puzzled.

Her ladyship had left early; gone out alone, he said. She might be in to lunch or she might not.

Where did he think she had gone?

"I believe the place was Marshom Street, or some such name," said the man. "It wasn't in any neighborhood I know of, but I think it's some charity 'er ladyship goes to."

Marshom Street? Lady Hornden had never heard of it. Could he find out from the maid when she would be back? He went upstairs; he seemed to be gone a lifetime. Then he returned with an address scribbled on paper.

"This is where the maid thinks 'er ladyship is, my lady," he said. The address was in the East End.

"Good heavens!" said Lady Hornden. "Where is that? How long will it take me?"

"The best part of an hour," said the man.

"Then I will come in and wait." I may only pass her on the way, she thought, and she will see the paper.

By-and-by the servant came to her with an open book.

"I see there is a telephone in the 'ouse; shall I send a message?"

"Ring them up, and I will speak," said Lady Hornden, thankful to have something to occupy the anxious moments.

* * * * *

Louisa had measles. Mrs. Catchpole was very complacent about the baby's illness, but Billy and Sally thought seriously of the matter. Measles had raged in the court all the summer; it was measles the Murphy's baby had, and something else that measles brought along with it, and the Murphy baby died. It was measles too that had given Sarah Green's baby the blight, and left it blind with one eye.

Mrs. Catchpole said Louisa would soon be well. She wrapped her in a blanket, and told Sally to keep her indoors for a day. So both Sally and Billy stayed in and played with Louisa, and felt the importance that was theirs in the eyes of the court, there being some distinction in having illness in the house.

But even such an event as measles was thrown into the shade by the fact that Elizabeth had called to see

Mrs. Catchpole, to say that a place had fallen vacant at the last moment in a party of children who were going off next morning into the country for a fortnight's holiday. They were late this year, she said, but special permission had been given.

Mrs. Catchpole was amiable enough to consent to this plan. Elizabeth turned to go, but paused on the threshold.

"Of course there is nothing infectious in the house Mrs. Catchpole? I generally have to get a doctor's certificate, but as there is so little time, you must give me your word."

"Not such a thing in the 'ouse, miss," replied Mrs. Catchpole. "Biby 'ere's got a bit of a cold, but that's the only thing as I knows of in the 'ouse."

In the excitement of getting ready, Billy quite forgot Louisa's measles, and when he went to bed that night his conscience reproached him.

"Sal," he said, "I don't fink it's fair of me to go awiy an' leave the kid."

"She'll be all right," said Sally. "Why, she's much better a'ready."

"I'll bring 'er back all sorts of fings," he muttered, as he fell asleep.

Next morning he was up at six, bathed himself in the bucket, brushed his clothes, and made Sally's boots —which she had generously lent him for the occasion— shine as they had never shone before. His mind was in a bewildering state of happiness.

While Mrs. Catchpole put the finishing touches to his toilet, Sally sat by the fire in her shift, nursing Louisa, and giving Billy instructions as to the care of her boots.

"Now mind yer don't spile them, an' be sure an' tike 'em orf if yer goes on the grass."

"Yaas, an' I won't iver go fishing in them."

"Yer'd better not. Wy, thet'd spile 'em et onst."

Mrs. Catchpole was trying to fasten a paper collar round his neck while he kept twisting his head that he might smile at Louisa. But Louisa was peevish, and refused to say good-bye, and even cried when he persisted in kissing her. Mrs. Catchpole remembered when he had gone that she had forgotten to warn him not to mention measles.

There was a long interval to wait after his toilet was complete, but Billy walked off his excitement up and down the broad thoroughfare, where he passed many of his friends, but was too full of importance even to stop and "pass the toime of diy."

The train was to go at eleven, but the children were to meet at ten, in order to walk together to the station, and as Billy turned the corner of Marshom Street, on his way to the school-house, where they were to gather, he saw the electric brougham glide up to the door. He was too busy with his prospects to think of stopping, although at any other time the "moto" had a strong fascination for him.

Katherine was rarely out so early, but she had resolved to see Elizabeth again, for the sight of her white face had tormented her, and she was very anxious to try and be of some comfort to her. She felt almost unnaturally good when she got up half an hour earlier, and ate a very hasty breakfast in order to get to Marshom Street and return before Eric came to luncheon.

Her self-complacence was, however, somewhat damped when she found Elizabeth still strange and distant, and it seemed as though no endearments would break down the barrier which had been so suddenly built up between them.

"Does she think I neglected her?" thought Katherine, and she began elaborately giving Elizabeth all sorts of

reasons why so long an interval had elapsed between her visits.

"I did not expect you," said Elizabeth, "don't trouble to tell me. I was not disappointed, because I never thought you would come."

Katherine felt impatient. Why should she take the trouble to get up so early and come right across London to sympathize with Elizabeth, and then be snubbed and snapped at in this way? But she felt so strong a belief in her powers to win that she was not easily baffled, but redoubled her endeavors to recapture Elizabeth, though without any seeming success.

Presently Martha opened the door, and in came Father Martin. Elizabeth introduced him, but he did not catch her name. He bowed and began asking her if she was familiar with that part of London.

She talked enthusiastically of Elizabeth and her work, and of the admiration she had for all who lived in "these horrible streets."

He smiled one of his slow smiles, and looked at her with his kind eyes.

"We are not to be pitied," he said; "we have our compensations, haven't we, Elizabeth?"

"Oh, of course you must feel all the good you are doing," she answered quickly. "I know that must make you happy, but the misery and dirt and smells would kill me."

"Oh no, they wouldn't; you would get used to them," he said. "What you never get used to, is the joy of being loved by these dear folk. That's a thing no one ever tires of; it makes up for everything. You think so, don't you?" he said, turning to Elizabeth. She did not answer.

Katherine colored.

"Yes, I can understand no one would tire of that," she said.

There was a pause. The sun had come out and shone into the little room, lighting up the maroon paper with pale patches of light. The court was more silent than usual, and Katherine began to think of going. She certainly had had no success with Elizabeth, but she liked this kind old man.

Suddenly the air was filled with a hoarse cry, and the sound of hurrying feet.

"Full account of the ingigement at the Vaal River! List of the killed and wounded!" and then a little fainter came the words from a greater distance, "Full account of the——"

Father Martin went to the door, and called the boy back, and brought in the pink paper, and looking down the long list, he began slowly reading aloud:

"Killed, the Hon. C. Grover, Major Hollowell, Captain Sir John Cliffe, Lieutenant ——" but Katherine had seized the paper from his hand.

"Where, where? Let me see. It isn't true—it can't be! Let me see! Oh, my God! My God!" As her eye caught the words she sank down beside the table with a long wailing cry.

The old priest bent his head and clasped his hands. There was a silence, and then Elizabeth knelt beside her and put her arms round her, and whispered something to Father Martin.

Katherine laid her head on Elizabeth's shoulder like a sick child, and let her lead her to the armchair. She seemed dazed—unable to hear or see. She did not cry, but her face was set and white.

"Killed! Jack killed?" she said, and looked up with wide-open, startled eyes.

Father Martin knelt down beside her. He was praying in a low voice. Then he turned to Elizabeth, and said:

"Go home with her." He stooped and took her hand; it lay limp in his.

"My child," he said, "I am a stranger to you, but I am a priest, and my mission is to help men and women in all times of sorrow. If I can be of comfort to you, may I come to you at any time? God bless you and strengthen you, and help you to understand that there is no death, it is only life which has moved on a little faster, for a while, than we can travel."

He spoke with the conviction of one who knows, and Katherine listened like a child learning a new lesson.

Then he was gone. She got up from her chair; she was deadly white, but she stood very straight, and her voice was calm.

"Elizabeth, I must go."

"The telephone, miss," said Martha, as she put her head into the room, as the imperious bell rang in the passage. Elizabeth reluctantly went out. The door stood open, and Katherine heard her say in answer to the inaudible question:

"Lady Cliffe is here; she is coming now."

Katherine went into the passage and stood beside her. She took the instrument from Elizabeth's hand and listened.

"It is my mother," she said.

"Get her to come soon. Don't tell her, but I have bad news."

Lady Hornden did not know the listener had changed.

"I know it," answered Katherine, "Jack's dead," and she laid the receiver down.

"Jack's dead! Jack's dead!" That was what the throb of the electric motor said to her, "Jack's dead!" She heard it above the grinding traffic.

The vivid remembrance of his strong, straight figure filled her mind. Where was he now? Under the green

veldt. How did he die? Did he suffer? Did he think of her? Other memories crowded in, but she thrust them out. The thought of Eric seemed far away; the last months were blotted out—gone. Only Jack filled her thoughts.

Elizabeth put her arm round her. It was a comfort to feel some human care was near her. She did not speak; she only sat looking dumbly out until they reached Hill Street.

"Come again soon," she said, as she kissed Elizabeth.

"I am so, so sorry for you. If I can be any help I will come," she answered, "but it is worse for me than for you, if you only knew."

"What a hatefully selfish thing to have said," thought Elizabeth, as she saw Katherine totter into the house to meet Lady Hornden, who clasped her in her arms. Then she turned away, and took the underground back to East London, but all the way she felt strong remorse for the wretched egotism of her last words, and hoped Katherine had not heard them.

Elizabeth returned to Marshom Street with despair in her heart. She imagined that her trouble mainly arose from the fact that she had behaved in a crisis with what she called despicable weakness, but the certainty that Jack's death would mean the final destruction to her hope, was really at the bottom of her misery.

She went into her little bedroom to take off her hat, and sat down upon the side of her bed. The events of the last few hours passed before her. The intense pity that she had felt for Katherine began to give way to a feeling of resentment. It was certainly a shock, but it only meant that she would be free to marry the man with whom she had been flirting for weeks. The man who lay dead had really been displaced long ago, and after all the uncertainty, after all the hopes and the

fears, after all—Eric would marry this woman. Then she looked up, and saw the crucifix hanging on the bare wall above her bed. I have not even religion left, she thought, for I have hatred in my heart. If I knew what love really is, I suppose I should be glad that he will be happy. But I can't, I can't, I am so bad. And she threw herself on her knees and tried to pray.

Presently she heard Martha's voice calling to her.

"Miss Elizabeth, please to come down, you are wanted. Something's 'appened while you was out. They want you quick."

"It's only a fight," she thought, as she got up from her knees and put on her hat. "Surely I might be spared more horrible times! I am coming," she called. "Tell them I am coming."

CHAPTER XVIII

KATHERINE had been put to bed. In moments of great sorrow, when action is of no use, it is probably the most comforting place, as one can feign sleep which stills talk, and talk at such times is the one intolerable thing.

Lady Hornden rustled in and out on tip-toe, bringing in port wine and jelly, food which is generally believed to be appropriate in times of affliction. Then she would clasp Katherine in her arms, and tell her that life still held much happiness, and that her beautiful darling would get over it. It was the shock that was so cruel.

She spoke in loud whispers, came back into the room after she had left it to draw blinds down, or to put wood on the fire, for Katherine had shivered with the cold that comes from desolation. Then she would turn to the bed again to see if she slept, but she lay still and white, with wide-opened eyes which looked at nothing.

"If she would only cry," she said to the maid. "It is so unnatural; I have cried without ceasing ever since I heard it."

By-and-by the servant came to tell her Mr. Errington was in the drawing-room. She hesitated what she had better do, whether she would go down to him or send him a message, but finally settled to see him. She felt a little nervous, went to the glass and arranged her hair, and powdered her face. It was an awkward interview she thought; but it's no use arranging what to say, it's better to trust to the spur of the moment.

As she opened the drawing-room door she saw at once by the startled look on Eric's face that he had not

heard the news, and could not understand her presence there. She came across the room with her hand stretched out, held his for a moment, then sank into a chair and covered her face.

"I see you have not heard," she whispered.

"Heard what? Is Lady Cliffe ill? Heard what?"

"The tragic news," she said. "We are overwhelmed. Read that," and she put the telegram into his hand. He went to the window. There was a pause.

"Great Scott!" he said under his breath. The words swam before his eyes. Katherine free? Was it possible? Was he after all to have this unspeakable luck—— Then the remembrance of Jack came to him, the sound of his voice as he held him when he was wounded on the veldt, the strong figure, so full of exuberant vitality, and with it the remembrance of the dead he had seen lying with upturned faces came before him; the still, stiff figures, with all individuality gone. Then the thought of Katherine came back to him, the slender figure, the beautiful face. How did she feel? Did her love for him overmaster at this moment all other feeling? He turned to Lady Hornden, whose head was bowed, although he knew she had been watching him until the moment he looked round at her.

"This is awful," he said, "Poor old boy! The best man and the best soldier I have ever known. How is Lady Cliffe? When did she hear it?"

"She saw it in the paper. Poor darling! She is utterly overwhelmed, she hardly speaks, and is as white as a lily-blossom. Of course, I am utterly heartbroken. The sight of her grief overwhelms me. He was the best husband, and the best son," and she buried her head in the soft cushion and cried.

Eric felt uncomfortable. He was sure Katherine would wish to see him, was longing for his comfort,

and yet he did not know how to convey this to Lady Hornden.

"Can I be of any use to Lady Cliffe?" he said.

"Thank you," said Lady Hornden. "I have asked my brother to go to the War Office to hear particulars, and see about things. No, I don't think there is anything."

"Will you tell Lady Cliffe I am ready to do her bidding, if she would care for me to come—if she asks for me?"

"She has not mentioned you," said Lady Hornden, secretly delighted to be able to say it. "If she does, I will tell her."

Eric felt puzzled. "She is probably dazed," he thought. "I will go home and write to her. She will want me when she has recovered from the shock." He felt a sense of proprietorship which made conventionalities seem intolerable. He wanted to break them down as soon as possible, to assert the supremacy which he felt was his right. Why should anyone stand between him and Katherine? With difficulty he mastered his resentment, and replied: "Oh, of course she can think of nothing yet, but tell her I am ready at any time to do anything for her." Then he questioned her as to how Katherine had heard the news.

"She was at some charitable place in the East End," said Lady Hornden. "I don't quite know what. A lady answered me through the telephone."

The color came into Eric's face. So she heard the news of Jack's death at Elizabeth's! How extraordinary life is. He wondered what had passed between the two women; how Elizabeth had behaved; what Katherine had said?

He listened to Lady Hornden's explanation of her own feelings after the telegram; her fears of being too late; how she meant to break it to Katherine; her agony at finding she already knew, but how her love for Jack,

and her own great grief, had to be smothered on account of Katherine, to whom she was now everything. Then his mind reverted to the strange coincidence at Marshom Street.

"How extraordinary life is!" he said again, as he shut the front door.

Katherine did not recover strength. Doctors came and went. They said Lady Cliffe's nervous system had undergone a severe shock, and prescribed a rest cure. For days Katherine lay in bed listless and silent. She asked for no one, and she cared for nothing. Through the waking hours, when her mind turned to the memories of the past months, she tried to slam the door on the recollection, and to shut it out as completely as she had excluded all remembrance of Jack during those days with Eric, but she found it so difficult that she set to work to make herself believe that she had never felt anything more for him than pity and friendship.

When the remembrance of his words and his look returned to her, she told herself that she had renounced him forever. Jack seemed to her more present than when he was really living. She had a strong feeling that now he knew all she was feeling and doing, and that she did not mean to disappoint him. The belief she had in his goodness made her detest the thought that she had been treacherous or unfaithful, and Eric, judged by Jack's standard, lost considerably in her estimation.

Her future seemed to her clear. She would spend it in a dignified solitude. She was never happy unless she could place herself in a position where she could fulfil the rôle which appealed to her at the time. With Eric the tie had been one of æsthetic cultured intimacy—she would not call it love. Now life had changed. She would go away and live among Jack's tenants, a solitary

and pathetic figure, bringing happiness to others, though life held no more happiness for her. When once she had thus framed herself, she began, almost unconsciously, filling in details—she would dress always in black, close-fitting, with long clinging lines.

She must have one interview with Eric and tell him that to expiate the past they must part forever. Jack would know that she had done this for him. She felt sure that, unseen, he would be present at the parting. A myth was gradually forming round the memory of the pleasant matter-of-fact Englishman, with the true heart and guileless nature, and he was taking on in her memory complicated forms and subtle qualities which he had never possessed.

Lady Hornden was at her wits' end; she could not understand the situation. If Katherine would only talk, would only give her some idea of what she intended to do. She was puzzled because she did not ask for Eric. In one way she was of course glad, but on the other hand, when she saw her so wan and thin and lifeless, she would almost rather have heard her ask for him and desire his presence, than lie there day after day, apparently wanting nothing on earth.

"It is really maddening to me as a mother," she exclaimed to Mr. Farningham, "to feel so absolutely helpless. To show you how bad things are, I can't interest her, even in her mourning. I got Vendré to come from Paris with the most divine black tea-gowns, and she would not look at them, and said when she was better she was going to Freeder, who makes all those trapsey high-art clothes. It's despairing!" And she clasped her hands. "I told her the other day that I was sure it would do her good if I asked a few people to dinner, really intimate friends who would understand if she laughed a little, and not be ill-natured, but she only

seemed vexed, and I dropped the subject. It's wearing me out."

"It's most trying," said Mr. Farningham soothingly, "but dear Lady Cliffe never does anything ordinary or expected. Everybody was saying that of course poor Sir John's death would not come as a great grief, but they were wrong, for really she is much more cut up than Lady Burley, who positively worshipped her husband."

"You must be a fool, and so must everybody who doesn't see that Katherine adored Jack." Lady Hornden was really annoyed. "Lady Burley," she said, "showed her grief in a sort of middle-class meowling way all the time he was away, which would have been impossible to Katherine; but now I should like to know if the ill-natured idiots are not satisfied that Katherine is really broken-hearted."

"They ought to be," said Mr. Farningham, feeling he had made a *faux pas*. "I told the Duchess of Lowestoft the other day that Lady Cliffe had not seen Errington, and that she lay dangerously ill and would see no one."

"What did she say?" said Lady Hornden, a little mollified.

"Oh, she said she supposed she would recover in time. She is very prosaic, you know, and can never understand anything thrilling." He did not add that he and the duchess had arranged just how long a time would elapse before Katherine married again, and that he had added that he thought it very clever of Katherine to keep Eric at a distance and not to fall at his feet like a ripe plum.

During the third week after the news of Jack's death, a letter came to Katherine, written two days before he was killed. She held the envelope with the well-known writing in her hand.

"May I be alone, please?" she said to her mother, who at once burst into tears, and said it was not natural.

She would surely want to have read it, she thought, leaning on her mother's breast, but Katherine was silent, and she felt she had no choice but to fulfil her wish.

The letter lay before her, the last she would ever get. With a pinching feeling at her heart she remembered that sometimes lately when they had come, she had gone out before opening them, and left them on the hall table. She took up the blue envelope and kissed it.

"Oh, Jack," she said, as she stroked it softly, "I do love you; you believe it, don't you?" But the ticking of the clock was the only answering sound. Then her thin white hands tore open the cover, and she took the letter out and read it.

"My Darling,—

"I must write you a very short letter, as I am pushed for time. We have just come out of a little fight, not interesting, and hardly to be called a fight, more like a game of long bowls with guns. We had very few casualties. I was unfortunate enough to be next to a man fairly squashed by a shell. He was sitting on a wagon, poor dog! and the shell landed full in his chest. They took him away in a sack. I don't know why I tell you, only, I suppose, because the horrid sight is still so vivid. I am all right. I have ridden 150 miles in six days, and am as fit as a fiddle.

"I am sending you this early, as, thank goodness, we are on the move again. The Guards went to-day, looking splendid, and I go to-morrow at 4 A.M. If only the Boers will stand anywhere, there will be an end of it, but I am afraid we shan't have any more big battles, and if so we shall go dragging on. As the men passed

to-day I heard a Tommy say, 'we shall all be dead soon.' It's true of thousands, but the rest will do the job O.K.

"Take care of your dear self, and don't forget your

"Loving old

"JACK.

"P.S.—Got the cigarettes all right and the chocolate and soap, and blessed you a thousand times."

The postscript went home like a knife. Jack's sister had sent these things. She had meant to do it, but had put off going to the shops. The letter seemed so living. Was it possible that since he had written it, his hand was stiff and cold. She shut her eyes and tried to picture him dead. She had done so many times before, but the remembrance of his voice or his laugh was much more present.

She put the thin blue paper down again and lay back. She could not cry, only the dull heartache was physical pain, and she pressed both her hands to her side, and felt faint and giddy.

Lady Hornden soon rustled into the room again with the nurse, bringing beef-tea and toast, and she was almost thankful for the break in the unending sadness of her thoughts.

At length Katherine recovered sufficiently to leave her bed and to go downstairs. With a return to daily life, she knew that she must see Eric and tell him how things must stand between them in the future.

He had written to her several times, very tender and considerate letters. She had only scribbled her thanks in pencil, and had not attempted to answer them. He looked at the shaky handwriting with mixed feelings, pity for the poor prostrate little body, and some impatience with the weakness that could not shake off the physical

effects of a shock, which could have no deep mental meaning.

At last he heard, on his daily enquiries at the house, that she was able to come downstairs, and he knew that the hour of their meeting would not be long delayed. It was therefore no surprise to him to get a telegram asking him to call next day at five o'clock.

Katherine constantly corresponded by telegram. It saved trouble, and on this occasion she did so, because it avoided definite expressions. She spent the next morning in mentally rehearsing the scene between herself and Eric. She would not prolong it, she thought, but briefly tell him her determination as regarded the future. She would dwell as little as possible on anything that had happened in the past. It was the great moment of her expiation, she felt, and she was preparing for the sacrifice, and yet so great had been the revulsion caused by the news of Jack's death, that she knew in her own soul that, at that moment, it was no sacrifice.

For the first time for weeks she took an almost feverish interest in her dress, arranged her hair with care, and went downstairs looking pale and transparent, but with an ethereal beauty which gave her added charm.

She stood by the window waiting for Eric to come. The moments seemed days. What could she say to him? He would take so much for granted.

The door opened, and Mr. Errington was announced. She turned as he came in, and held out her hands, a slender figure in her long black drapery, with sleeves which reached barely to the elbow, showing her arms thin and white. Her face wore an expression which Eric at once recognized as foreign to his remembrance of her.

"Are you better?" he said, eagerly seizing her hand and kissing it, and holding it between both his

own. "I have been mad with anxiety. Are you really stronger?"

"Yes," answered Katherine in a voice so low it was almost a whisper. She felt as though she was being strangled. Now that he stood before her and looked at her with his appealing eyes, what could she say?

"Sit down," said Eric, with an expression of command. "Don't stand, it's bad for you. Don't tell me anything, I know it all; I understand it all. Only tell me about yourself, your health, your wishes."

She sat down at a little distance from him.

"Eric," she said, looking up, "I can't tell you all that has happened, but I see and know I ought never to have let you come as you did. I ought not to have allowed your friendship to make people think I did not care for Jack, because I did really." The last words were said very feebly, she hardly knew how to get them out. Eric was watching her.

At first he felt an almost uncontrollable impatience. Then as he saw her so frail a thing, he knew this could only be a phase that would pass, if he played carefully. He would not draw the line to snapping point, but let her expend this mood, and then she would be his.

"Of course no one really thought that," said Eric. The words were a great effort. "Everybody knew you were sorry for me, because I was lonely and ill. Dear old Jack himself would have been the first to understand."

Katherine caught at his words with new hope.

"Yes," he said, "you're right; he would, wouldn't he?" and the situation seemed to adjust itself in a way it had not done before. Then she began to explain her plans, speaking very fast, and playing nervously with her chain.

"Well, that seems wise," said Eric, when she paused.

"You will go into the country, as you say. I believe that is probably best. After all, solitude teaches us many lessons we can't learn otherwise."

Katherine looked up startled. Was he prepared to take her great renunciation so lightly? The scene somehow was not what she had expected. She wondered vaguely why she did not find it a relief, but somehow she did not.

"Jack's home will be the best place," he continued. "I think I understand all you feel, only remember, when you want me, I am on sentry duty out in the world, watching to do your bidding."

"He certainly has wonderful qualities," said Katherine when he was gone. "So much intuition and tenderness. He never needs one to put dots on the i's and to cross the t's; he understands, and fills in all the blanks."

"Poor little soul!" said Eric, as he sat looking out into the street from the windows of his club. "She is in a very exaltée state, but she will come back to the every-day world; only I must have patience; and that's the very devil."

After her interview with Eric, Katherine sent a note to Elizabeth, asking her to come and see her, and, somewhat against the grain, Elizabeth obeyed the summons. She was shown into Lady Cliffe's long low room lined with oak. A fire burned in the hearth between beautiful Italian dogs, and above it, let into the woodwork of the chimney-piece, was a portrait by Van Dyck of a woman in white satin and fur. Some low bookshelves ran along the wall below the square oak panelling, and a green damask sofa was wheeled near the fire, and by its side stood a table with hot-house flowers in silver cups, among the many bibelots and ornaments.

Katherine came in almost directly, and took Elizabeth's hand and kissed her, and both sat down on the sofa.

"Oh, Saint Clare," she said, "I can't talk about it all, but I'm going away from London, and I want your advice. I'm going to live in the country and try to help the people. I shall be all alone all the rest of my life, and I want to try to make somebody else happier."

She began explaining many schemes. Elizabeth listened. She was half carried away by Katherine's enthusiasm, and half distrusted the duration of her resolves.

"Michael would say," she said, after listening to plans for almshouses, and children's homes, and refuges, "that you had better go round your own cottages and look after the water and the drains, and the number of rooms, and find out what rent they pay."

"Oh, what a dull, tiresome person he must be," said Katherine. "The agent does that, doesn't he? I don't want to become a sort of sanitary inspector."

"Do go down first and see it all. Don't fix on anything definite till you get there, and then you will judge better. Mr. Fane could help you splendidly," said Elizabeth, "and so could Father Martin."

"That dear man I met that day?" said Katherine. "Oh, I loved him. Do you think he would?"

"I know he would," she said.

Katherine was rather damped by Elizabeth's very practical advice. She had expected to find her enthusiastic over the schemes she proposed, and she did not at all like her very prosy view. Cottages? Of course they would be all right, they had no poetry or charm; but long, low almshouses, with a beautiful line of roof, a harbor of refuge for the old and sad, like Walker's charming picture—that was delightful. "They get into grooves, these good people," she thought, "but I fancied Elizabeth had more imagination. I must see Lady Augusta, and hear what she says."

All the while Katherine was talking, Elizabeth wondered what part Eric took in all this. She could not bring herself to ask, but Katherine made no allusion to him, and Elizabeth could not understand it, and went away completely mystified.

CHAPTER XIX

Billy stood on the platform among the screaming, shouting children, on his best behavior, at the railway station. He remained immovable where he was told to stand, with his hands behind his back, watching the trains come and go. When the older children crowded into the carriage Billy waited till they were all in, and then sat down quietly beside the master in whose care they were to be. The young man tried to talk to him, but Billy was shy. He sat with his arms folded, looking out of the window.

At last their station was reached, and the whole party rushed out in mad disorder. A wagon had been sent to meet them, and they clambered in over wheels and sides, like a swarm of ants. Billy secured a seat on the front beside the master.

The wagon started and away they went, rumbling through the little town. It was a quaint old town, little more than a village, with red-roofed houses and narrow streets. The sky was unclouded blue, and the whole scene was full of vivid color to Billy's eyes. Trees grew in all sorts of unlikely places. Here a big chestnut-tree, with golden and pale-green leaves, threw its shade over a red gabled roof. There a row of pollard elms stood in the open street. There were still flowers, Michaelmas daisies and late-blooming roses, in the little patches of garden. One rose he saw had been pushed through the railings, and nodded its head in the street. The mild air was warm, and the smell of the earth, and leaves,

intoxicated him. He leaned back in his seat and gave way to uproarious laughter.

"What's the matter with you, youngster?" asked the master.

"Nufink," said Billy; but he changed his laugh to a silent smile. It was all that they had told him and more, this wonderful country. He could see the fields velvety green, the hedgerows cool and shady. The creak of the wagon was music to him. What would Sally say if she could see him now? Then he remembered Louisa, and the picture clouded over.

"Our biby's gort measles," he said sadly, looking into the master's face.

"What?" said the master.

Billy repeated his remark in a frightened voice.

"Where? When? Why was this not known before?" the master raved.

Billy was aghast. He told him all about Louisa, with a growing fear that he had made a mistake. In less than two minutes he was standing on the road watching the wagon slowly creak up the hill without him.

"Come along, youngster," said the master, "I must send a telegram; you'll have to go home."

The wagon turned the corner. Billy silently watched it. Was this to be the end of his dreams? Was it for this he had got up early and bathed in the bucket? There was no more joy in Sally's boots, in the new paper collar, or the bright blue bow. There were the fields before his eyes, and hedgerows and flowers. Bears, he knew, were waiting in the woods, and fish in the river. The sun shone gaily on the little town, but the wagon had gone, and Billy's sorrow had almost stunned him.

Mrs. Catchpole sat on the bed fanning herself with her apron. She had just come back from "The Red Lion," where she had been drinking with a neighbor.

Louisa, who was declared by her mother to be convalescent, sat on Sally's knee by the open window, watching with the vacant eyes of extreme youth the children at play in the court below.

"Lord, ain't it 'ot?" said Mrs. Catchpole. "Who'd think as it were October?"

"Yaas," said Sally absently. She was thinking of Billy, and wondering how far he would be on his journey, wishing a little enviously that she could have gone too.

"I'm as dry as ole 'Arry 'eself," went on Mrs. Catchpole.

Sally did not reply. Mrs. Catchpole rose.

"'Ere, Sal, cut acrorst ter 'The Lion,' an' bring me a pint of 'arf an' 'arf. Arst the man ter stick the liabel on, an' yer can git it."

Sally rose reluctantly, and laid Louisa on the end of the bed which stretched across the window.

"Waal, then, yer must see ter the biby while I'm awiy," she said, as she took a can from the table and departed for the beer. She walked leisurely, for her thoughts were still absorbed in the longing to share Billy's outing.

Sally had barely left the room when Louisa began to cry. It was bad enough to have measles, but to be suddenly put down flat on a bed out of the nice fresh air, was more than a baby could bear, and she howled loudly.

Mrs. Catchpole was too hot to be bothered with nursing the child, so she took the dirty pillow from the other end of the bed, and sat her on it, on a level with the window-sill.

"There, now, chuck that rar, and behive yerself," she said, and seated herself once more on the bed.

Sally sauntered along, swinging the can by her side. At the end of the court she met Polly, and stopped to

speak to her. Polly was selling lemons, and too busy to talk. Sally watched her for a few minutes, and then strolled into the public-house. Coming back she stopped again, this time to watch a fight, but the arrival of a policeman put an end to the dispute. She turned the corner of the court, and was lazily proceeding on her homeward way, when a shrill scream of terror startled her. She looked up just in time to see a fluttering bundle fall from an open window, to hear a sickening thud as it struck the pavement. A moment later the court was crowded with people.

"Tike it ter the 'orspital!" shouted one.

"Go for a copper," shouted another.

Sally pushed her way through the crowd. She knew what it meant. That thud was throbbing in her ears. She pushed roughly past the people. It was her baby, her very own; no one had a right to touch it but she.

When she reached the centre of the crowd she saw Mrs. Catchpole sitting on the pavement, with the still body of Louisa on her lap.

It must have been quite three hours later, when the excitement had died away, that Sally, sitting on the bed in the empty room, felt an odd stiffness in her hand —she looked down, the can of beer was still clutched in her fingers.

They had taken the shattered little body away. Mrs. Catchpole was next door with Mrs. Green, being consoled with repeated half-pints. Outside the sun still shone with the pale gleam of an autumn evening. The children had exhausted the subject of the accident and had gone back to their games. Sally looked at them with a far-away feeling of unreality. She saw a small boy come slouching up the court, unnoticed by the other children. She thought she knew him, there was something familiar about the blue bow at his neck. He turned

in at the street door. She drew back into the room and looked round in a quick, frightened way. He was coming upstairs.

"Billy, it warn't my blime," she said with a little whine, as the door opened and he came in.

Elizabeth found them huddled together on the bed. Neither cried, but there was a look in their faces which told a sorrow deeper than tears.

She sat down between them and put her arm round each. She tried to tell them of the angel that had taken Louisa in kind, strong arms away above the grimy streets and smoky chimneys.

"I expect it's like the country," said Billy, with a dry sob.

The darkness gathered, but she sat on, and they clung to her with their little rough grimy hands. Her own heartache taught her to understand better, and as she walked home she felt that somehow this had happened before, and recollected the child under the stars the night Eric sailed.

"Is that what sorrow is for?" she thought.

Two days afterward Mrs. Catchpole was blocking up the narrow passage in the house in Marshom Street with her big body.

"Well, miss," she said, "I ain't got nofink ter bury 'er with, I ain't, it's the Lord's truf." And she wiped her inflamed eyes on her ragged apron.

"Now Billy and Sal is insured, an' I was allays a meanin' to insure the por biby, but Mr. Catchpole, 'e's bin aout a work, an' I that porly iver since she was borned, I hain't done a stroke, as trew as I lives."

Elizabeth felt convinced that the last fact could be proved to the hilt.

"Well, you see, miss, it's this wiy. I did siy ter Mrs. Finchley, thet's my landlidy, I says, 'I'll 'ev ter go ter

the parish abaout 'er. I ain't got enuf for ter bury 'er,' and she says 'Don't you do that, Mrs. Catchpole, you'll regret it all the diys of yer loife,' she says. And my Billy and Sal, they was near ravin' abaout it, and says as they'd go awiy if Louisa isn't buried decent. So I goes ter Mr. Wright, in the Cornford Road, an' I says, 'What'll yer do it for?' An' 'e says, 'Three poun' ten under the feet,' an' I says, 'If I can get the money I'm done with you,' I says, for under the feet, you see, miss, for a hinfant is quite respectable."

Elizabeth listened. She was too well acquainted with the sight of constant funerals not to know that "under the feet" meant the combination of hearse and carriage which tucks the coffin under the driver's box. She hesitated. She was always strongly warned by Miss Osterley to give no funeral money, but this once, she thought, just once; and the remembrance of the two children overcame her scruples.

"I'll give you two pounds toward it, Mrs. Catchpole, if you can find the other thirty shillings."

"I dare say I could do that much," said Mrs. Catchpole, carefully concealing her content; "I'm sure I'm very griteful to yer." And the business over, Mrs. Catchpole fell to weeping again, as was proper for a mother in bereavement.

That matter settled, Elizabeth went back to her room, but the next Saturday, as she went out on her rounds, she passed a black carriage with the driver wearing a white streamer, black figures inside, and two little faces gazing from the window. It was an hour of importance and pride. The drive up the long road past all sorts of familiar faces, such as the church and the school, was of such supreme interest, that, for a time, pleasure almost overmastered pain; and it was only when the grand carriage had gone, and the black, lent for the occasion

by sympathetic neighbors, had gone too, that Billy and Sally, wandering out into the court, realized the fact again that Louisa was "awiy there under the ground," and would never crow nor cry any more; and their arms and hearts felt very empty.

"I shall be off on the doss a bit, Sal," said Billy. "I'll come back, I promise yer, but this yer's 'orrible, and I must git aout."

"Oh, Billy, mind you come back," sobbed Sal.

Michael Fane was at all times a busy man, with a mind which gave itself whole-heartedly to the interest of the hour. He had acquired a habit of work so strenuous that deviation from his routine seemed to him a waste of energy, and he had almost brought himself to believe that any indulgence of his own tastes or affections was equally a deflection from the straight line of self-suppressing duty, which he followed relentlessly.

He had for Elizabeth and for his mother so loyal a devotion, that any sacrifice for their welfare which he felt was right, would be to him not only possible, but welcome. But he looked on his love for them rather as a weakenss than a gain, and often denied himself the delight he had in their society, because he had an almost morbid dread of allowing pleasure to acquire any power over him. He was not analytical about himself, but if two ways were open, he generally felt it right to take the one which afforded him least satisfaction.

He was unhappy about Elizabeth, when he allowed himself to think. He saw that she was languid and depressed, that she had less spring and vitality than when she first came to London, that she had lost belief in the outworking of remedies, which he held would eventually do much to heal existing ills. He did not know how to advise her, but in order to help her to over-

come her depression, he was continually encouraging her to do more work. He was puzzled to know where the trouble lay. Was she still thinking of that fellow Errington? That seemed to him to be almost a lack of self-respect. What could she hope for from a man who had deliberately left her from the most sordid motives? Was the work she had undertaken distasteful? He felt sure this could not be the case, as he saw daily the evidence of her real love for the people among whom she lived.

It was all an enigma. He would give worlds to shield her from trouble, and yet he saw each day the look of sadness become more habitual, and he turned back to work with a dull ache, which seemed to him lamentable weakness.

At last he decided to talk the matter out with Father Martin. He found him late one Sunday evening when church was over. He was sitting in his study by a fire which his housekeeper had insisted on lighting, in spite of his remonstrance that the season of fires was not yet. He was very white, and the lines which seamed his face were strongly marked in the flickering light, but the smile with which he welcomed Michael made him look almost young for a moment.

The two men sat together discussing Michael's errand to Germany, the state of German factories, their system of insurance, and some troublesome complications among unions at home, when suddenly Michael said:

"The fact is, I did not come to discuss these things; I came to talk to you about Elizabeth."

Father Martin looked up quickly. Then he said, as he stooped to poke the fire:

"I am glad of that. I am not very happy about her; she looks harassed and troubled."

Michael found the subject more difficult to tackle

than he had imagined, but he gave a short outline of what he believed had happened at Ilbury.

"She was the most joyous child you could imagine," he said, "till she met that young jackanapes who played fast and loose with her, and then went off on the pretext, I believe, that his uncle's fortune wasn't as great as he thought; and now, I hear, that he has come back from South Africa, and has been flirting with Lady Cliffe, whose husband has just been killed."

"Poor child!" said Father Martin slowly. "But Lady Cliffe was at Marshom Street the day she heard of her husband's death. She was broken-hearted; I don't think she can have been to blame."

"I don't know anything about her," said Michael, "only I believe they were always together while her husband was away. But it's Elizabeth I want to help. What can be done?" and he glanced up eagerly.

Father Martin sat looking into the fire, his hands on his knees, a figure bent and shabby, but with a head which stood out against the darkness of the room, when the light shone fitfully from the flames, with all the dignity of one of Angelico's saints.

"Does she know you care?" he said after a while.

"I don't know," said Michael. "I never told her so."

"There are other ways beside speech," said Father Martin. "Does she know you care to be with her? Do you find time to have long talks?"

"I have very little time," said Michael, looking at Father Martin wonderingly. "I am always hard pressed; but Elizabeth knows that; she knows I never have a moment, and she has very little time, too."

"But of course you have some leisure? You must have that. Does she know that you consult her, care for her opinion, get her help? Don't you understand what I mean? To know that you are indispensable to

another human being is the direct road to love. Dependence is the first gate. Women are made with a desire to help; it's the mother instinct in every real woman."

Michael looked again at Father Martin. His brow was knit; he was thinking hard.

"By Jove!" he said, "that's a new idea. No; when I have been to her, I have always given her advice and laid down the law. You see I have known her ever since she was a little girl; it never occurred to me——"

"No, I suppose not," said Father Martin smiling. "It didn't occur to you that the little girl, grown into a woman, is probably a great deal wiser than you are, that she can protect you quite as much—no, a great deal better than you can protect her; that we are all just the children of every good woman."

"Well, but what must I do to save her from this man?" said Michael, as though anxious to come back to first principles.

"Show her how necessary she is to you, that you lean on her, want her, that the blank without her will be unbearable. I expect she thinks now that you very kindly spare her a little time when you can, in order to give her good advice and keep her going along your lines."

"Yes," said Michael slowly, "I suppose she does."

"That will never make any woman love," said Father Martin, looking into the fire again. "You have to ask her to give, and you may get the greatest treasure the world can bring you; but treasure is sought for deep and long; you can't turn it up with your foot, and if it is worth finding, it is worth looking for."

"I expect I have been a horrible conceited prig," said Michael, throwing himself back. "I seem to see that I have. The question is whether I can ever undo it."

"No, not that, not that," said the old man slowly;

"only you've put, what you think is your work, out of proportion in your life. There are so many sorts of work. It doesn't all mean grind. There is a beautiful tender work which some are given, and the great mistake is to imagine that that doesn't matter. The happiness of humanity is a splendid thing, but sometimes it has to be thought out *en bloc*, sometimes just for one person. But happiness, to bring it, to give it, that is the great aim of life. The mediævalists have thought that suffering was the gift of God, but it is joy to give which is the very essence of divine life, for it contains the foundation of every good. Who could be joyous who defrauded his brother, or soiled his soul, or was cruel and bitter—all these things kill joy. Only to the child-heart is joy possible. I suppose it is unconscious superstition which still makes us mistrust happiness, and give a merit to suffering."

"I expect you are right; you always are. I will begin again. God knows I don't know that I could ever make her happy, but I'd give my soul to try."

"Well try," said Father Martin. "Be human, and make her feel she is wanted as much by you as by the child in the court who clings to her."

"Thank you," said Michael, standing up. "If it isn't too late, I'll try."

"God bless you," said Father Martin. "I wouldn't say that, if I didn't feel that; though you are groping about in the dark, and can't see Him, your heart is as true to Him as the needle to the pole."

The two men shook hands, and Michael turned to go. After he shut the door, the old man got up and knelt at his prayer desk before the ivory crucifix, the only beautiful thing in the grimy room, and thought of the man and woman, in the immediate presence of the God who is love.

CHAPTER XX

Two months after Sir John Cliffe's death Major Guthrie was invalided home; he was an old friend of Lady Hornden's, and had known Katherine ever since she was a child. He had written to tell her that he would himself bring Jack's personal things. He felt sure that she would rather he took charge of them, and therefore he would keep them for her until he could give them to her.

He wired on the day he landed to say he would be with her next day, and on the following afternoon he was sitting in her room by the fireplace, and opposite he to him on the green sofa she was listening to all the details could give her of her husband's death.

The elderly soldier, with a skin like parchment and cheeks hollow from his recent fever, was very gentle, and very sorry for the woman who sat so white and still while he told his story. It was never an easy task, he thought, but this was dreadful. He tried again and again to bring her some comfort, it was so horribly sad.

"The poor boy ought not to have been killed—it was not a battle, only a little skirmish. He was with a patrol, and they met a small body of Boers, probably not more than twenty. A man was wounded, and Jack stopped for him and put him on his horse, and a Boer turned as the rest scattered and fired a rifle. It went straight through his heart and he fell stone dead; he could not have suffered a moment. He was such a good, good chap—the best," said Major Guthrie, as he nervously turned and twisted a paper-knife he had taken from the table, near the sofa. "I couldn't tell you,"

he went on slowly, "how the men loved him, officers and men—always cherry and good company, and kind—by Jove! he was a real good fellow."

He put out his hand to take hers, sympathetic and protecting. Katherine put her thin hand in his for a moment. She could not cry; she could not believe in the reality of the scene. It seemed to her as though she was acting a part. The curtain would soon go down, and then she would get up and go back to real life.

The fire hissed and crackled in the hearth, and for a few moments this was the only sound. Major Guthrie took a small parcel out of his coat pocket and cut the string, liberating the packets which were wrapped separately.

"Here," he said, "are the little things they found. I thought you would rather no one else touched them. I felt I should like to bring them myself." He laid the parcel on her lap.

She took up each little packet and unwrapped it. There was his watch. His mother had given it to him when he went to Oxford; the words "from mother" were engraved inside the case. She remembered he had shown it to her, saying how characteristic it was that the inscription should be so short; he must have inherited his curt ways from her. The watch-chain she had seen so often, and a pencil he always used, hung from it. The sleeve-links she had given to him when they were engaged, plain gold with an engraved crest, for Jack had a horror of wearing stones.

There was still another packet. Major Guthrie had got up when she opened the parcel, and had stood with his back to her, looking out of the window. She opened it slowly—a locket with a chain. She held it wonderingly. She had never known he possessed this.

"Was this found too?" she said.

"Yes," he answered, turning for a moment, "they were brought straight to me."

She looked at it again, and tried to open it, but the catch was stiff.

"I never dreamed," she thought, "he would care like that. I wonder where he got it," and she almost smiled to think of Jack, with his horror of sentiment, wearing this little love-token. It was open now. The light was not good—hair, and some writing in small printed letters, which she could not read. She bent down over it, and turned it to the firelight. Hair black as night! What did it mean? She felt a sort of sick dismay, then clasped the locket and held it tight in her hand.

Major Guthrie had left the window and sat down opposite to her again. She put a strong check on herself, and said:

"I can't tell you how I thank you. It was so dear and good of you to bring them. I should not have liked to have had them from anyone else."

Somehow, unconsciously, her tone had changed; it was harder, drier than before. He felt the difference, but did not try to account for it. She is overcome, he thought, and does not want to give way.

"My mother wants to see you," said Katherine; "will you go to her? She is downstairs. I am sure you will understand if I say I want to be alone. Don't let her come to me. She will care so much to hear all your news."

He got up and looked down at her. The watch and chain and sleeve-links lay on the sofa. The locket she still held tightly in her left hand.

"I can't thank you enough," she repeated wearily; but the words seemed almost to push him from the room.

She walked with him to the door and shook hands again, and then, as he shut it, she went quickly to the window and wrenched open the locket once more. Yes,

there was no mistake—hair black as her gown, and opposite, in tiny printed writing, the words: "For my beloved, from E. M."

She felt stiff and cold. What did it mean? Her head reeled; she could not think. Every power seemed paralyzed. Outside, the carriages rolled in dull monotony. The well-dressed people were driving just as they did an hour ago—the happy people who had no pain—the shops were full of pretty things, and the theatres would soon begin. The world was going on, and on, all round her. The winter afternoon was closing in, night was coming. She leaned her head against the window-pane. It was not the same world as it was. Everything was gone. Jack—what did it mean? Jack, whom she loved because he was good and different from other men. Was he really just the same as everybody else? Had he some vulgar intrigue, some history, which made him just like other people, only much worse, because he was always by way of being different? She could not place him in this light, try as she would. Her thoughts turned back and back. The days and minutes were shrinking; time seemed to have ceased; life all one day. It seemed as though this morning they had stood together under the roses in the long garden, with the summer sun over them. She saw him, straight and strong, look down on her, and stoop and take her hand, and tell her she must have guessed what he was going to say, and then, when he had told his love, how he had lifted her face under her garden hat, and she had felt the dice of fate rattle out of the box as she cast it, and said that she would be his wife. Could he have been deceiving her? Could he have loved someone else—then? Was he deceiving her through the short days of their married life, when he used to talk to her of the ideal he wanted her to fulfil, when he constantly said that life was a serious

thing, with serious duties, and spoke of their responsibilities; and all the while was he leaving her for this other woman, who called him "Beloved?"

She felt like a child who had built up its house of cards bit by bit with careful hand, and then suddenly some careless passer-by had shaken the foundation, and the whole had tumbled into ruin, and nothing remained—only a few useless memories. She walked to the fire and sat down. She still held the locket.

"E. M., E. M.?" she said. It was degrading even to wonder what it meant. "Let the ugly secret be buried," she thought, "and let me never remember it again."

Then the destruction of the plans she had made came sweeping over her. There was no memory now to care for, no expiation owing to him for her folly. There would be no sense in spending a life mourning for Jack, who cared for someone else while he was alive. It was all hollow humbug; and she rubbed out the picture which she had drawn, with feverish haste.

For a while her icy desolation left her in a solitude so complete that the thought of no other human being found its way into the dreary region of her future, but at last, as her mind began to readjust itself, she thought of Eric, and it was almost with a sense of triumph that she resolved to close the door of memory, to drop the burden of remembrance, and go out empty handed to grasp all that the future held for her, and walk the ways which might lead her into happiness. Only she knew that her belief in God and man had gone, and instead had come a reckless longing for a life which should help her to forget.

Katherine stood in Elizabeth's room. She had ordered the brougham and had driven straight across London. She must tell her at once that the plans she had built up were shattered. As she whirled through the lamp-lit

streets she could not decide whether to tell her the whole story, or only to say vaguely that she had changed her mind. Both appeared to her unsatisfactory.

To Katherine, who had always stood in her world as the woman admired and adored, it seemed a terrible humiliation to confess that she had found some other woman, or even the memory of another preferred before her. And yet, if she altered her plans from mere caprice, she could see the pitying look in Elizabeth's face for a woman so unstable. She felt, as she had often before, that she must let the matter be decided on the spur of the moment.

Elizabeth was out. Martha thought she would be back in half an hour. Katherine was restless, and walked up and down the little gas-lit room. She could not bear these waiting moments. Thoughts were torture, and solitude intolerable. She tried to detain Martha, but after a few answers to her questions, Martha, who had a deep respect for "titled people," believing her presence an intrusion, withdrew into the kitchen.

She looked round the room. There were Elizabeth's books as she had left them. What had she been reading? Two new novels, "Green's History of the English People," a book on the Boer War, and a series of essays on social questions. Katherine opened them one after the other, then laid them down, sighed, and walked about the room again. Presently she stood before the writing-table, a small heap of tradesmen's books, the club books, and mothers' meeting accounts. How deadly, thought Katherine, as she looked at them. Her eye caught a small worn book which lay by their side, a Bible with the usual black binding. She took it up. The gilt had long gone from the edges. The paper was yellow. Elizabeth must have used it all her life, she thought. The book was full of photographs, little religious prints and dried

flowers. I wonder what meaning they have for her? thought Katherine, as she carefully turned the pages. The fly-leaf was covered with fine writing and minutely printed quotations. At the top of the page, the initials were written "E. M.," and underneath, in fine printing, the words, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Katherine read them through twice. What did they recall? She was sure she must have held that book before, then trooping through her brain, reeling out in hot haste, came the memories of the afternoon, and with half a cry she put the book down, opened the little purse bag she had slung on her arm, and with trembling fingers disentangled the locket from its wrappings, wrenched it open again, and laid it on the book. There was no doubt, the writing was the same, "E. M." and the word "Beloved." It could be no mere coincidence. She bent down and looked again. Yes, every fine stroke and careful trick were identical.

"Elizabeth," she said, almost as though she saw her standing there, her face framed in the dark hair.

Then she sat down again, her feelings for a moment dulled. She must think it out. What clew had she? What could she piece together to tell her she was right? She tried to remember all that Elizabeth had ever told her of her life. It was not much, Katherine remembered. She had mostly spoken of her own concerns, had asked her a few questions. She recalled the days when she had spoken of Jack. Elizabeth had always seemed indifferent, and yet somewhere hidden in her memory there was something she could not recall. Carefully she went over and over the day when she had heard of Jack's death. What was it she vaguely recollected?

"I have it, I have it!" at last she said, almost aloud. "It was in the carriage when she kissed me, and said

it is worse for her than for me," and she threw the book on the table, as though she would hurl the vehemence of her scorn at the good people whose idols she had set up.

Then she fell to wondering again, with her head pressed in feverish hands. What could the story be? When had they met? How was it possible that Elizabeth, with her clear transparent eyes, could have deceived her all the while? And yet, why should she doubt? If Jack was false, why not this girl too?

Bit by bit she remembered how she had said the friend she knew in South Africa was dead. Had she received earlier news? She could not think clearly enough to know if this were possible. She recalled how, on the very morning of his leaving, Jack had gone out and left her alone. Was it in order to see Elizabeth, to have a farewell with one who called him her beloved, while she, Katherine, was waiting for him? The evidence of her senses failed her; white was no longer white, or black black. Her mind was in a tumult as the waves of recollection surged up. One moment the whole thing seemed a preposterous folly, the next, so convincing there was no loophole of escape from her conclusions.

At last the key scraped in the keyhole of the street door, and Elizabeth stood on the threshold.

"Oh, I am so, so sorry; I never thought you would come, or I could have got through the class twice as quick. I just made out the time, thinking there was only supper to look forward to."

She came toward Katherine, both hands outstretched; but Katherine stood quite still, a straight line of black, by the writing-table.

"I came," she said, and her voice was very hoarse, "to ask you one question. I think I may be certain you will answer me truly." She looked straight at Elizabeth, who looked in return at her with wide-open

eyes of wonder, as though she thought her sorrow must have turned her head.

"I want to know if this is yours?" and she held out in the palm of her black-gloved hand the little gold locket with its broken chain.

Elizabeth looked down at it for a moment. She had grown very white.

"Mine?" she said.

"Yes, yours," said Katherine, and she almost pushed the locket open, into her hand.

In a moment the color flew to Elizabeth's cheeks, passing over them as the setting sun may touch a cloud at sunset, and then leaving her face white and set again. She looked at it for a moment. How had she found it? Among Eric's things? Of course she was probably now engaged to him, and she thought with scorn of all Katherine's grief.

"Yes," she said, looking up at Lady Cliffe. "Yes, this once was mine."

"When did you give it?" asked Katherine.

"I can't be questioned about it," said Elizabeth, standing very straight. "I refuse to say one word. I have told you what you asked. The past which that belongs to is mine, it is dead and gone, and I will not drag it into light. It can do no good, only hurt me, and perhaps hurt you."

Katherine was silent. She had not expected this answer.

"Don't you see," she said at last in cold even tones, "that if you refuse to say anything you may wrong someone, give a false impression?" and she looked at her almost appealingly.

"I can give no false impression; there is none to give. I gave it to the person in whose possession you found it. I can't say any more, and you mustn't ask me."

There was dead silence.

"You can, of course, refuse to tell me more, but before I go I want to say that to-day all my ideals have been killed. I believed in him and I believed in you, and now I know there is no such thing as a good man or a good woman; that I shall never see a man who professes to be honorable and true, but I shall feel that deep down in his heart he is deceiving, if someone trusts him he will betray him; he is nothing but a coarse animal, like the rest of them, with low intrigues. And I shall never see a woman who is supposed to be doing good, that I shall not know it is a *pose*, and that she too has her miserable squalid love affairs, and will snatch a man from another woman as ruthlessly as a dog will steal a bone. Thank God, my eyes are open. I see the world as it is, in all the slime and dirt of its hypocrisy."

Elizabeth stood still as though she was turned to a stone. What did this outburst of jealousy mean? It was horrible. Could any woman so lose her dignity? She at any rate would keep command of herself. She was perfectly silent for awhile, and then said:

"I cannot talk to you as you have talked to me. I have told you all I ever mean to say, and beyond that I have nothing to tell."

"Good-bye," said Katherine. She was gone, and Elizabeth was alone.

* * * * * * *

Michael had thought again and again of Father Martin's advice. He seemed to have shed a new light on his intercourse with Elizabeth. He was right, no doubt. It was his own selfishness which had hitherto spoiled his affection, and she had only seen a self-absorbed man, with whom she had infinite patience. With characteristic violence he threw himself into this view, and determined that from henceforth she should see the fruits of his repentance.

Filled with this thought he went to her room at nine o'clock. Supper would be over he knew. It was the time, and the day, when leisure might be reckoned upon for both. The door was opened by Martha and he walked into the sitting-room expecting to find her reading by the fire in her accustomed place, but Elizabeth was sitting at the writing-table, her head in her hands, and the outline of her figure suggested the most absolute dejection. Michael hesitated; then she turned and got up, and held out her hand.

"I didn't know you were free," she murmured.

He looked at her quickly. She had not been crying, but she looked as if she had seen a ghost. He sat down, awkward and silent. He was no diplomatist, otherwise he would have so dexterously handled her that he would have led her gently round, and she would have found herself speaking of her grief before she was aware he had approached the subject.

The strong figure sat in the firelight, and the eager eyes were fixed on her, and then at length, in almost beseeching tones, he said:

"Little Betty, you are unhappy. Do let me help you. Tell me if I can."

The touch of human sympathy broke down the barriers of Elizabeth's reserve, and bit by bit she told her story, touching lightly on her engagement to Eric.

"You see," she said, "he could not help it; there was the place to keep up, and the money was not enough to justify his marriage."

Then in broken sentences she told him about Katherine. He put a strong control on himself, and he did not show the deep resentment he felt toward the "mean dog," as he inwardly called Eric.

At last, when she paused, he looked up at her, and his eyes glistened strangely, as he said:

"Poor little Betty! Have you been carrying this big burden all alone? Could I do nothing to lighten it for you?"

"I knew how full your thoughts were of other things," she answered, and her words carried a reproach, of which she was unaware.

Michael winced.

"It's a damnable business," he said, as he looked again into the fire. "Of course it will sound rot to you, but I can't help saying it. Do try and put the whole crew out of your mind. It seems to me that you will have no peace till you have done it. This man and woman ought not to spoil your life."

"Oh, I know, Michael, I know," said Elizabeth. "You will tell me there are others to live for, and so there are, but sometimes it seems almost impossible to care for dull duty, it is such a dry, hard thing; and then everything is ugly, oh, so ugly," she said, holding her hands up, as though she were warding something from her, "horrible streets, hideous houses, and often such ugly, ugly lives. It's this dead level of ugliness which almost kills me, and it all seems as though we were doing no good, only robbing our own lives of things that make them worth living."

Michael sat silent. At any other time he would have fiercely argued the point with her, but he began to realize that the social work, which to him was absorbing, combined as it was with the interest of his profession, was a daily sacrifice to her. His mind was essentially Puritan in mould; to him principles were as the breath of life. He had no passionate desire for beauty; in his daily existence the incentive to unceasing toil was to bring ultimate blessing to the world; in the better ordering of life, he found his ideal. He saw the beauty of a spring morning or a summer night, but it was an unimportant fact, a

pleasure he enjoyed as a change from serious work. It did not possess his soul, and fill him with a great longing to live near to the heart of that which gave it birth. He had not a quick sight to catch every transient mood of sky and cloud, of light and shadow, every delicate texture of the changing seasons, but he had eyes for the sadness of humanity.

He took in at a glance the horror of an unsanitary area, the poverty hidden beneath a thin layer of respectable cleanliness. He could diagnose the symptoms of the ill-fed, and pick out children from a crowded class, with unerring judgment, who were ill-treated or half-starved. It was, therefore, to him an effort to throw himself into this longing after what he would call material beauty, which so possessed the soul of Elizabeth, and yet he tried to understand.

"You ought to get away oftener," he said. "You ought to go into the country. My mother is longing for you to go to her. It would give you change and the surroundings you care for."

"But don't you see," she answered, "that's the whole difficulty. I can't get away. It is not my body that wants to be free, it's my mind. If I go among fields, I see before me the streets and the children; and when the flowers are round me, I smell only the dreadful houses and the baking streets. I can't forget; I can't get away; I feel chained to the horror of it. Don't think me foolish and hysterical," she said, as she put her hand up with an almost imploring gesture, "but I sometimes think that to have seen it all, to have known it, eats the heart out of life."

"I don't understand," said Michael, but he spoke very gently, "how you can really logically look at it all quite like that. I have no certainty as to the individual direction of the affairs of our little planet, other than

that which we as intelligent beings can bring about; but you, Betty, believe in a Supreme Will, which orders good and evil. Can't you leave the arranging of it to higher knowledge?"

Elizabeth turned round and looked at him.

"Michael," she said, "I do believe, I do try to believe, but it is so hard to think that the wrong which we would not for a moment allow is permitted by a Being infinitely good."

"Talk to Father Martin about it," said Michael helplessly. "I am sure you are not looking at things from a strong sane standpoint, and your own sorrow dims your vision about everything in the world just now."

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "I sometimes feel that only the very happy should work in these surroundings."

"I wish to God I could bring that into your life," said Michael, as he looked at her, and the strength of the purpose which possessed him shone out as he spoke.

"Dear old friend," she said, and she laid her hand on his shoulder as she got up and stood beside him, "you have made me ever so much better and stronger by letting me talk to you to-day. I don't know how Vesuvius feels after an eruption, but I'm sure its fiery heart must be relieved, and my crater seems less pent-up with furious thoughts, and burning hate, and all sorts of bad red-hot things," and she gave a mirthless little laugh.

CHAPTER XXI

"I'm certainly glad; I may have had objections long ago. Katherine was a mere child, she did not know her mind. It's a mercy that after the stress and strain through which the poor lamb has passed she should have found a fold to anchor in," said Lady Hornden, her metaphors getting a little mixed. "It has certainly brought me relief, and Eric is really very charming, a little too—artistic," hesitating for a word, "but very delightful."

Anne Rodney was sitting in the house in Park Lane some weeks later. She had just heard of Katherine's engagement to Eric, and she had been intensely anxious to discover what had so suddenly dried her tears, and why, within a few months of Jack's death, her engagement was privately announced to her intimate friends.

"I am delighted she is happy. I don't like Eric Errington, but that's a detail. It's a mercy we are not all made alike, otherwise the scrimmage for one man would be appalling. But do tell me how it is that Katherine, who was heart-broken, has so suddenly got over poor Jack's death?"

"She was not heart-broken," said Lady Hornden, valiantly abandoning the position she had so persistently maintained. "It was a terrible blow, and of course no one can be married to a man without feeling"—she felt she was becoming involved—"terribly shocked, and Katherine is very sensitive; but dear old Jack, whom I really was devoted to, was almost too matter-of-fact for her, she is so poetic and so full of ideals, and all that sort of thing," she added vaguely.

Anne looked at her with her steely blue eyes. She longed to remind her that she had always told her Katherine did not care for Jack, but she refrained.

"Is she happy now?" said Anne. "When I saw her I thought somehow she looked worn, but perhaps that's only the effects of the shock."

"Katherine's a shadow; I can't make it out. I've taken her to Dr. Reader, the specialist, and he says he will watch her. He didn't understand what was wrong. He put her on beef-tea and port. She wasn't a bit better; so then I insisted on her seeing Argon, and he took away all meat, and makes her eat toast and drink milk. What are you to believe? It's worse than religion. They all differ absolutely, and they are all so certain they are infallible."

"And what has become of the girl in the slums Katherine was so mad about?"

"I don't know," said Lady Hornden. "I suppose she hasn't time to think about her. I have heard nothing of her, and I'm glad. I don't want her to go to those nasty typhoidy places, smelling bad smells, and carrying back microbes in her skirt. Oh, how good of you to come, Sir James," she said, as she held out her hand to the newcomer.

"Whose skirts carry microbes?" said Sir James, after he had shaken hands with both women. "Is it indiscreet to ask?"

"The women who are foolish enough to go to the slums," said Lady Hornden.

"Good Lord," he answered, throwing up his hands. "I've seen many new manias, from crinolines to motor cars, but upon my soul, that taste beats me altogether. Everybody's mad. I met that pretty Sherringdon girl the other day, looking tired, with her face dirty, and as draggle-tail as possible. Where had she been? Oh,

to Whitechapel or Limehouse, or some such hole. 'What good do you think you do?' I asked her. 'Oh, nothing much,' she said; 'but everybody goes now.' 'Pon my word, it's absolutely preposterous. Why not stick to our end of the town, and enjoy what the gods send us?"

The conversation was interrupted by the advent of Katherine. She looked pale and thin, but her eyes were large and bright, and her presence as usual had a brilliance which always seemed to surround her with an atmosphere of success.

She laughed when she saw Anne, held out her face to be kissed, and said:

"I don't expect you were awfully surprised. I knew mama would tell you, though I don't want it blazoned out just yet." She shook hands with Sir James, who murmured his congratulations.

"Are you going to take Eric slumming?" said Anne, "in order to show him the only side of life I am sure he hasn't seen."

"No," said Katherine, "I am going to spare him that. We are going down to Ilbury to see what has to be done to the place. His aunt is living there, just to keep the house together, but he has gone to-day to break the fatal news to her, and ask her as delicately as possible to withdraw."

"So I suppose you are going to give up East End saints, and doing good?" said Anne. "We were talking about this mania for East Ending before you came."

"Well, there's something to be said for mixing philanthropy with pleasure," said Katherine, the color coming into her face, as she stood before the glass above the chimney-piece, untwisting her veil from her large black hat, and unscrewing the little knot under her chin, "because when pleasure fails, as you grow old, philanthropy will receive you into its house, and you end your days

as a distinguished good-doer," and she gave a bitter little laugh.

"When I see the sort of women who start out to do it, I am fairly puzzled," said Sir James. "I daresay I'm old-fashioned, but I can't see the point of doing good between evil; it seems to me both are spoiled."

Anne laughed.

"It's on the no-drink-between-meals principle, which, if it became universal, we are told, would mean that meals would go on all day, and so digestion would be ruined as well as brain."

"At any rate, let's have our meal now, even if it does not last till dinner," said Katherine, as luncheon was announced.

"With all my heart," said Sir James fervently.

"What I always say," said Lady Hornden, with an air of finality, while they were eating *hors d'œuvres*, "is, that it is really impertinent to go poking about other people's houses. Fancy if anyone called to tell us we were not to play at bridge, or motor and golf on Sunday."

"They do try to tell us," said Katherine; "only luckily we don't hear them. If they attempted to come and give advice in the house of anyone whose income was over two hundred a year, the owners would call the police."

"Where is your slum saint, Katherine?" said Anne. "Are you going to ask her to Ilbury with a selection of her converted costers?"

"No," said Katherine shortly, and turning to Sir James she asked him if he had heard the new opera, which had been given on the previous night.

"Indeed I have, and thank heaven that there is still a man who can write melody, instead of producing the clashing of milk-cans on the pavement, in the early morning, and calling it music. Here was music which

Grisi and Malibran could have sung, and not the throat-destroying yells which people will listen to for seven hours, and pretend they enjoy it."

Anne and Lady Hornden differed, and the conversation drifted into a long discussion on the merits of "The Ring" versus what Anne called the "organ grinder airs of the Italian."

The argument lasted long after coffee and cigarettes were brought, and ended only with the parting of the guests.

* * * * * * *

The gray stone house stood still and solemn in the sunshine. Here and there the light caught a window-pane which glistened diamond-like; beneath the heavy eaves dark shadows hung, making a long splash of violet color against the gray.

It was springtime and there was a dance in the air, a sound in the woods, which told of that enchanting season when Persephone, aroused from her long slumber, steps forth to meet Demeter, who, through the dull dark days, has waited patiently for the gladdening sight of her lovely face, and, as she treads the green young grass, the blossoms bloom, and her coming is hailed in chorus by the winged lovers of the woods, for the world is once again touched into life, and kissed into beauty.

Katherine and Eric had driven up from the station, and as the carriage turned out of the avenue, he stopped it before they reached the entrance.

"Don't go into the house now," said Eric, "this is not a day for gardens and lawns, but for orchards and woods," and he slowly drew Katherine toward the gate which led into the park. "We can come back to the old place later, but this heavenly spring morning calls us with such an irresistible voice."

He put his arm round her, and together they wandered

out across the long sweep of park until they came to the uplands where hawthorn-trees were already beginning to show "milky pearls" among the vivid green of the spiked boughs, the yellow celandines were holding out their golden cups to the sun, and a blackbird sang above them.

"It's a day that makes me long to shout," said Eric; "to tell the whole world I'm glad to be alive, that I have all the good I want. Don't you feel it, Katherine, this sense of life pulsing and beating through all creation, and making the world beautiful for you and me?"

Katherine looked at the tall, well-built man, broad of shoulder and clear of eye.

"I'm happy of heart," she said, "but I don't feel physical energy enough to shout; but it's glorious, glorious." And she looked out over the golden gorse to the blue distance of hazy hills.

They sat down together on the bank. The warm sunshine wrapped them round and the air was filled with the hum of insects brought to life by its vitalizing power. They were very still for a moment, then Katherine said:

"I should like nothing ever to happen any more, the world to go on just like this, I'm so sick of events."

"I want one event to happen," said Eric, looking at her, "just one, and then a truce to everything else."

Katherine was lying full length on the grass, watching tiny insects crawl in and out among the stalks. She was very silent, absorbed apparently in her occupation.

"What are you looking at?" said Eric.

"I am looking at these wonderful things," she said. "I can see the ant here wandering in the trackless forest. How awfully rough the road is to her. Look, she is pushing and carrying her load. Now she is stopped, and four others have come to help her. There is a giant mountain

before her, she has passed over it and is working for all she is worth, going long distances to avoid a thick clump of grass. Poor little busy thing! How important it must all seem to you."

"Why do you settle that it is a female ant?" said Eric.

"Because she is really doing the work of her world, and I bet some male ant is getting the credit."

Eric was watching too.

"I often thought in South Africa," he said, "that is what we all looked like, crawling over the veldt in the livery of the earth, hosts of tiny things bent on destroying each other."

"It's what all the world is," said Katherine, "pigmies carrying their burdens and fighting their way through, meeting all the horrible obstacles, and still climbing on, because they think there is something to be gained in the end."

"Nothing or everything," said Eric, taking her hand, which was parting the grass tufts.

"Yes," she said, still looking down, "or everything. If minds could only be wiped clean like a school-room slate, after the sum is finished. That's life's great Nemesis. That is why the first youth is the only time for real happiness. After that, disillusionment comes on the heels of trouble. Oh, it's no good saying it doesn't—it does," she said, as he made a gesture of dissent. "All my life I have felt that I am ever so many people, that I was born with a sort of transmigratory power, which could get in and out of different sorts of minds; but the impressions I get in all these different characters stay with me, and I want to be rid of them."

He listened wondering. He had not known her in this mood.

"Life is so full of illusions. I can remember each one, as they brought their hateful awakenings. The first I ever had," she said, sitting upright and smiling, "was once when I was ill, as a child. Mama told me I might send out and buy whatever I liked, and I made the nursery maid put on her bonnet, I couldn't wait a moment, and bring me back a Noah's ark. I longed to have one; I had not played with one for ages. And she came back with the huge parcel," and Katherine made a motion with her hand to indicate the big bundle under the woman's arm, "and then she opened it, and I had a little tray all ready, and stood the animals upon it. One by one I took them out, the gray elephants, and spotted tigers, and scarlet foxes. I never smell fresh paint now that I do not think of it. And then when they were all ranged in rows, and Mr. and Mrs. Noah too, it suddenly came to me I did not want it, I had outgrown it, it gave me no pleasure, and I lay back with such a horrible aching feeling of disappointment, and cried to myself. And so often since then, things have been like that Noah's ark."

Eric came nearer to her.

"You shall not find any disillusionment now, Katherine darling. The rainbow is set in the clouds, the token of all good things."

"Ah, but I have had so many, so many disillusionments."

"Only because you never met anyone who really understood you, became a part of your mind; until then, no life is complete."

They talked on a while, then turned to go to the house.

Katherine was full of admiration. She saw the dignity of the place, and the possibilities which under Eric's taste and knowledge it possessed.

Old Mrs. Errington welcomed her shyly. She had

been living in a corner of the house, and the ugly boudoir was still her sitting-room.

"Eric told me," she said, holding out her hands to Katherine. "I was so glad—it would have made his uncle very happy. I am really glad he can live here. Of course it may want a few things; they say houses nowadays——perhaps some electric bells and new chintzes——"

Katherine smiled kindly.

"I am only sorry that I should seem to displace you."

"Oh, not at all, not at all," said Mrs. Errington, showing the way to the dining-room. "Every dowager leaves. My dear brother told me when I settled here, dear Eric was sure to—— Indeed, I am so glad he is——happy, he deserves it so. I shall always remember—— Dear Lady Cliffe, what will you have, chicken or cutlets?" And the remembrance was lost in the business of the moment.

The days were very pleasant. Eric was tender and understanding, and the interest in planning the remodelling of the old house was really delightful. The long drawing-room was to be panelled, and the pictures were to be taken from the dining-room, and set in the woodwork.

Eric sketched cornices and designed ceilings, and they discovered in the attics some really fine tapestry, which had been discarded in the early part of the nineteenth century for the horrible flock paper which disfigured the morning-room. This was spread out upon the grass, and Katherine and Eric went into raptures over the borders and design.

The last day of her visit had come, and Katherine was more hopeful of the possibility of happiness than she had felt since the day when she said she had ceased to believe in man or woman. To Eric, the days had been

as a dream, from which he almost dreaded some awakening. Everything had come to him—money, and consequently the enjoyment of his own possessions, and with it one of the most beautiful women in London, and the envy of every man who hoped to have been in his shoes. He looked at the old house with grateful pride. He had no money, but certainly he had a great place to give her, and she appreciated beautiful things, and saw its worth.

Now and then the remembrance of Elizabeth came to him as they turned along the way which led to the red manor house, but it was dimmed and blurred, and he only felt how great a mistake it would all have been, and had no doubt that she also realized it by this time.

"We will have one more walk, the last until you come back to the old place as home," said Eric; and Katherine willingly consented.

The afternoon sun was shining on the grass slopes as they crossed the park, making their way between the stalks of the ferns, still tightly rolled. At last they came to a fallen tree which lay across the valley through which ran the winding stream. The shadows quivered among the branches of the trees, as a chill wind parted the young green leaves. Katherine sat down on the fallen trunk. Eric was engrossed in his talk. They were discussing ethical questions, and Eric was maintaining that there was beauty in abstract goodness.

"There is no such thing as abstract goodness," said Katherine. "What may seem good to you would be counted wickedness in another age, or to another people. There is nothing worth living for but happiness or *bien être*, as the French call it. The only thing to be really desired is to be pleased with one's self and one's surroundings. Don't let's talk high-falutin stuff about goodness, Eric, it's always odious and generally hypocritical."

"Why are you so cynical?" he said. "It's bad enough in a man, but it's impossible in a woman."

"I'm not cynical," she said. "I'm only matter-of-fact. Life makes us that. It's unthinkable that, after twenty, anybody can keep up illusions, and I am twenty-three."

"Happiness will bring them back."

"Never," she answered quickly. "Not the same; others, perhaps, but not those that are crushed out."

She looked up at him, a frail little figure in her black tailor-made gown and big hat. It seemed to him pitiful that she should speak of disillusionments at a time when life should be dawning on her through a haze of happiness.

"But, Katherine, darling, I don't understand," he said, kneeling beside her. "You have had bad days, you have not been understood, your artistic side has been dwarfed, your idealism suppressed, but goodness was not wanting. You can't have learned to disbelieve in that?"

He felt as he spoke. How generous he was to concede so much to the past!

"Don't speak to me about it," said Katherine fiercely. "I have seen hypocrisy, and have recognized how hideous a thing it is—seen it in man and woman. I, who always thought that I was first with all who loved me, have found that I was deceived, betrayed. I can't talk of it, only never let me hear again of pure men and saintly women, for I should cry out loud, 'hypocrite! hypocrite!' till they ran away to hide the shame that I had laid bare." The color came and went as she spoke, and her eyes grew bright and large.

Eric looked at her almost with fear. What was it that so possessed her? Why had this thought so filled her mind and being? She waited a moment, and saw that he looked at her with undisguised amazement.

"Sit down," she said, "beside me"—she spoke in little short staccato sentences—"and I will tell you. You think I am mad, but I am not, only awakened. I had not meant to say anything till—till we were married, but I can't let you think you are going to marry a crazy woman, so I will tell you now," and then she told her story.

For a moment Eric did not understand, but as she went on to tell him of her interview with Elizabeth, the memory of the day in South Africa swept over him. He felt Jack's arm round him, and he recollected how before he had gone into the darkness he had put this thing into his hand. The history of that day had always been dim and blurred, but now the remembrance came flashing back, making him feel dazed and giddy.

"What did Miss Maynell say?" he said, and his heart beat.

"There was no getting away from it," said Katherine, "she could say nothing. I asked her if it belonged to her, and she said yes; I tried to get her to tell me when she had given it, but she would not. She was as dumb as a dog, and she stood there, looking me in the face, and would not say a word. I have never seen her again. Now you don't wonder that I am disillusioned about good people, do you?"

Eric was silent. What could he do? If he told her the truth, he must tell her the whole story of his engagement to Elizabeth, and she would probably go back to her absurd romance about Jack, and the prospects which were now so fair would be ruined; and yet it was dreadful to allow the dead who could not defend themselves to be wrongfully accused. Of course that must not be. When she was his wife, at some future time, he would tell her all about it. It was a horrible predicament, and it was hard thus to injure his own sense

of honor. Then he recollected how he had heard that it was a man's duty to deceive sometimes, for the protection of a woman. Of course this was an instance when it was really right, and he must certainly sacrifice everything to her ultimate happiness.

"You must not be disillusioned," he said lamely. "There may be some great mistake, some engagement before he met you. Such things have been, and poor old Jack may have looked on this thing as a sort of mascotte."

"Men don't carry love tokens, given to them by other women, if they care for their wives, and Jack of all men in the world! It's too absurd," and there was some contempt in her tone. "He was not a man to hang himself out in charms. If he loved this girl, he wore her hair because he was really devoted to her, for no other reason on earth. She was eating her heart out about some man in South Africa all the winter; I saw that, and you yourself heard her say he was dead."

Eric winced, as her words came quick and convincing. It was evidently no use arguing. So he put his arm round her, and told her very tenderly to put the whole question from her.

"Let the dead bury their dead," he said, "and let us be happy in the living present."

"I am glad I have told you all about it," said Katherine, as she rose and stood before him. And then, as she held out her hands to him, Eric remembered that on this very spot he had tried to comfort another woman, whose name to-day he had allowed to be done to death, and the coincidence appeared to him ill-omened.

"Mr. Cave is in the library, sir," said the servant, as they returned to the house.

"Tell him I will come," said Errington. "I must leave you for a few minutes, darling. It is my solicitor.

He has come about the settlements. I shall not be long. You will rest, won't you?"

"No," said Katherine. "I don't want to rest. It is still so lovely I will wander about a little, and wait till you are free. Don't hurry, I am all right. I will come in for tea," and she turned back into the garden. Eric shut the library door.

Katherine intended to stroll leisurely through the flower-beds, and plan what she would have planted for this summer, until she could get designs that suited her taste better than the existing old-fashioned parterre.

Presently she noticed she had lost her glove, and decided to walk back to the tree in order to find it. She went leisurely over the way she had come, discovered her property close to the fallen trunk, and turned to retrace her steps. She thought she could find a quicker way by taking a grass-path which diverged to the left, and which led, she remembered, to a lane into which one of the garden gates opened, for it was the shortest road to the village.

The shadows were growing long, and the wind was keen, so she walked faster, but somehow she had missed the turning, and instead of finding herself opposite the gate, when she emerged from the lane, she was high up the hill, looking over a wide sweep of open country.

A grass-field crossed by a narrow field-path lay before her. She looked round to see if anyone was near, from whom she could enquire the way, but the rooks were flying overhead noisily, returning to their rest, and no human being was at hand. Presently shuffling footsteps came behind her, and the bent figure of an old woman in a rusty brown gown, her face hidden under a sun-bonnet, came slowly up the little hill. She did not look at her as she passed, she seemed intent only on getting

sufficient strength to go on her road; so Katherine touched her arm. She looked round startled.

"Can you tell me the way back to the Hall?" she asked.

The old woman stopped, and pointed down the hill. "Straight on till yer cum ter the grass road, an' then yer'll see a little gaite on yer left 'and. That's the garden gaite, but maybe yer wants the great gaites?"

"Oh, no," said Katherine, "the garden gate will be all right."

"Be yer a-stayin' wi' the old laidy?" and the withered face looked curiously into hers.

"Yes," said Katherine, "but only till to-morrow."

"Ah, they tells me she's a-goin', por old laidy! Young squire's a-coumin' 'ome, a-goin' to be married, or sumethin."

"Yes," said Katherine, enjoying the incognito. "You'll all be glad he's coming back, won't you?"

"Well, if 'e's good to we, we shall be glad, but we doan't know nothin' aboat 'im, we doan't, but there is only a little time as sum of us will be goane. There's foar o' mine in the churchyard, lady, an' I'm a goin' there soon, so it doesn't much matter to we."

"Who is he going to marry?" said Katherine, anxious to hear the village verdict.

"Ah doan't know. Sum gran' lady, they says, wi' a power a muney. Ef 'e'd only married the right one, as iverybody thought 'e would, it 'ad been a lucky day for us poor folks. Ah, she was a good lady, she was, but I dessay she'd not a been 'appy wi' 'im—too good for 'im, I believe, an' then we're all a-goin' so soon, it doan't matter much what 'appens. You're a pretty lady," and the old dim eyes set in a web of years looked up again, "but we're arl a-goin' the same way, right ter yonder," she said, pointing to where the church tower

stood grey against the white sky, "an' they're a-carlin' of us to cum, they be." She bent down over her stick and shuffled on, and Katherine heard her murmuring as she went, "they're a-carlin' of us."

She shivered and turned her steps back in the direction the old woman had told her she would find the gate. "They're a-carlin'"—she kept on hearing the words as her dress rustled over the grass.

That evening she chaffed Eric about the "right lady" —who was it?

"What rot!" he said, as he laughed too. "She's an old crazy woman. You should not encourage her idiotic talk." But the old woman's words troubled him. Katherine must be kept from these foolish people, otherwise some village gossip might reach her and spoil her content.

They had wandered after dinner into the conservatory, which led out of the uninhabited drawing-room, and were standing near a fern-grown pool of water.

"Do you see that tiny plant?" said Eric.

"Which, the one with the long stalk floating there?" said Katherine, pointing to the spiral flower.

"Yes; there is a whole romance there. That is the female flower; the male grows low down in the dark ditches, but one day he detaches himself, rises upward, and goes to seek his love. He wanders down the water till he finds her, and floats with her for a happy while. Then she leaves him, and her stalk contracts and takes her down into the water, where the seeds ripen in safety."

"But where does he go?" said Katherine.

"He has no life in himself; he has broken his own life to go to her, and dies without her."

"We will not part like that," said Katherine with a happy laugh; "we will sail on together."

CHAPTER XXII

ERIC spent a wakeful night. He went over the events of the day again and again. He tried from every point of view to look at them in a satisfactory light. Nothing pleased him. How other could he have acted? What could he have said? Silence was as betraying as speech. He could arrive at no conclusions.

"The whole thing is damnable," he said, as he pulled up his blind; but the heavens were still starlit, there was not a ray of dawn.

Then terror seized him. What if she ever found out? She was hysterical and emotional; she would probably despise him, and never realize how he had acted for her good. There would be no knowing the consequences of such a discovery. He had entirely forgotten that at first he himself had settled to tell her the whole truth, when once they were man and wife. Then he thought of Elizabeth, and once again fear possessed him. If the two women should meet, it might be fatal. It was very strange that she had not spoken of their engagement—what could it mean?

Then he sat still for a long time thinking. At last a plan presented itself, and the more he thought of it the more the idea commended itself.

Why not see Elizabeth? She was still devoted to him. It seemed almost incredible, even to him, but he had every evidence that she still cared. Why not appeal to her generosity to keep his secret? It might please her to know I wore her locket, he thought, and no harm will be done. She is the only real danger, and that I

am sure not wilfully, but just through indiscretion. I believe she is really fond of Katherine," although she evidently lost her temper, and spoke to her most foolishly.

He walked about the room arranging all he meant to say. It seemed not only feasible, but the only way out of a tight place, and after having arrived at that conclusion, he lay down and slept.

The next day he travelled with Katherine to London; he had arranged to dine with her in the evening.

"Till to-night," said Katherine, as he stood on the platform, at her carriage door, "I've had a really heavenly time. You've been an angel to me, and I'm ever so much better," she added cheerily. "I love Ilbury; it's a paradise. God bless you. Good-bye," and she waved her hand and drove away.

Eric stood for a moment looking after her as the carriage drove off; it seemed to him as though some spell were broken, as if with the disappearance of Katherine there came an awakening from a long and happy dream. Then he called a hansom.

"I'll drive straight to Marshom Street," he thought. "I'll not give myself time to change my mind. I'll nerve myself, for her sake."

The cabman had never heard of the street, and demurred at the distance, but finally drove off far to the east. Through the never-ending drive, Eric tried to arrange first one opening speech, and then another. All seemed wonderfully inadequate.

"I must be tender with her," he thought, "and must just throw myself on her compassion. She will surely understand."

The cab at last took the turning that led to Marshom Street, and he found himself at the door of the corner house. The long spring day was still light,

although the afternoon was wearing into evening. Martha opened the door, and started on seeing Eric.

"He's come to tell her he can't live without her, in spite of the pretty lady with all her money," thought Martha proudly.

"Yes, Miss Maynell was having her tea. Would he please to step in?" And she opened the parlor door and announced him.

Elizabeth was sitting on a low chair before a little tea-table. The evening paper was propped against a jug in front of her, as she leisurely ate and read. She looked up, expecting to see Miss Osterley or Michael, or someone from the district, and the color came with a hot flush to her cheeks, as Eric stood before her. She got up and did not ask him to sit down, but looked at him with her clear eyes, but with a slight expression of contempt in the corners of the mouth.

"Why have you come?" she said. She was determined to give him no help.

As Eric stood there every sentence he had carefully arranged vanished from his mind.

"I have come," he said hesitating, "to ask you a great favor. Elizabeth, I am sure you won't deny it to me, for auld lang syne's sake."

She was silent, and he went on haltingly:

"The fact is, I don't think you half know how awfully fond I was of you, and what a terrible thing it was for me when we had to part; but you see, it was absolutely necessary, wasn't it, and if one does the right thing, or the wise thing, it is best in the end, isn't it?"

"Is that what you came to tell me?" said Elizabeth coldly. "You really might have spared yourself the trouble."

"Not exactly," said Eric; "it's one of the things, but not all. Katherine tells me that she came here to

ask you some silly questions about a locket that you once gave me, and which I prized very much."

A faint smile of pity flickered over Elizabeth's face.

"Don't you think you might omit these details," she said, "and get to the point?"

"Well, it is a really horribly difficult situation. You see I'm engaged to her now. After poor old Jack's death she shut herself up, and wouldn't see a soul, and got all sorts of romantic notions into her head, and I knew she was going to be miserable for life. Well—oh, it's a hateful story," said Eric, striking his hands together. "They brought her back poor old Jack's things, and this locket, and then she took an entirely different turn, and resolved to be happy, and of course it's really meant everything to her, because now she looks forward to a really good time again."

"I fail to understand you. What had the thing I gave you to do with Sir John Cliffe's and his wife's happiness?"

How dense she is, thought Eric; she has no intuitions. Then he said:

"I always wore your charm. Indeed, indeed, Elizabeth, you were always so near to me, protecting me and helping me; I always felt you would keep me safe, and you did. But when I was wounded, I gave it to Jack to bring back to you, and when I was invalided home, the poor chap was shot, and he had it with him when he was killed, and it was brought to her, with his things."

A strange light came into Elizabeth's eyes.

"Do you mean that the locket with my hair and writing was brought home to Lady Cliffe?"

"Yes," said Eric, "and you see how it means everything to me, that she should know nothing."

"I don't think I understand yet," said Elizabeth. "What do you want me to do? Lady Cliffe knows

that it was once mine, and she must, therefore, know now I gave it to you."

"No, she doesn't. Don't you see? Why don't you help me when it's all so hard?" he said, almost impatiently. "She thinks it belonged to poor old Jack."

"But where do I come in?" she asked again.

"Why, she fancies you must have given it to him. It can't mean much to you, but it means everything to me."

Elizabeth's face became perfectly rigid and very white.

"Am I to understand," she said, "that in order that you may marry Lady Cliffe, you want me to let her think that I had some low intrigue with her husband?"

"No, no," said Eric lamely, "but that perhaps you knew him before he married, and you cared for each other."

"And that he continued to love me after he was married, and that probably I did too, and that he died with my gift round his neck, and that although she came here constantly, I never told her that I knew him? My God! What do you take me for? For a being as mean, and with as rotten a sense of honor as yourself?"

"There are times when untruth is almost right, in order to guard another's happiness," he said almost pleadingly.

"Happiness—her happiness, to be married to a man with a lie on his lips, and a lie about the dead, because they can't rise up and show how poor and worthless a thing he is? Do you mean to tell me," she said, and each word fell clear and distinct, like a single drop of cold water on a stone, "that you are going to let her think her husband a blackguard, and that I am a contemptible piece of deceit, in order that she may have the happiness of marrying you? I can conceive no worse fate befalling any woman, no more horrible awakening.

Oh, I know you will say the grapes are sour, that I wanted to marry you myself," she said, standing very erect, and coming a step nearer to him, "but I, who have cared and cared for you, will tell you this: You filled all my waking thoughts, and I thought I could never have lived when you left me, but now I thank God for that day."

Eric looked at her as though she had struck him.

"Don't say such things," he said. "You will be sorry; don't say anything we shall both regret."

"I regret nothing; I say it deliberately," said Elizabeth, speaking quickly in a low voice. "I see now why it was best I should suffer, and I am thankful. No, I will not lie to please you; I will not blacken my honor and an honorable man's memory, in order to make it possible for you to step into his shoes, but this I will do willingly, joyfully—I will never see either of you again. You go your ways, only let me never know that you exist, never hear your name. I could not bear to remember that the being lived so mean as to take all a woman had to give, and then to ask her to stand under such a charge in order that he might marry another woman. Now go," she said.

"Then you will say nothing?" he murmured, not looking at her.

"I have told you that I do not want to remember that I ever knew you." And with that, she opened the door, and he, feeling as though he wished he could vanish under the scorn of her look, passed out into the street. He almost ran against a man who was coming toward the door, but he did not turn to see who it was.

The cab was gone. How was he to get back?

"Are there any cabs?" he said to a child on the pavement.

"Kebs?" said the boy. "None nearer than Aldgate. There's the trams down the road," and he pointed in the direction of the great thoroughfare.

Presently, seated next to a large Jewess and opposite another, he slowly jogged toward Aldgate.

"What 'ave j'er got in j'er bundle?" said one, as she looked at the horrible packet the other held.

"Chicken's pluck," said the other, and opened a corner to show the hideous contents.

As Eric crouched among the dirty passengers it seemed to him that his humiliation was complete.

* * * * *

Michael recognized Eric as he walked out of the house, and he determined to hear what had brought him to Marshom Street.

"What did he come for? I must ask you. I beg of you to tell me," said Michael, standing before Elizabeth, who had hidden her face in her hands.

"Oh, don't ask me; don't make me say. I have never felt really humiliated before. I have never believed that anyone could think I was mean and dishonorable. Was Aunt Harriet right? Did I let him despise me?"

"Don't be silly, Betty," said the man, with a set look in his face. Then changing his tone, he said: "Tell me the truth. Let me help you—let me share it all. By heavens! what right has that skunk to come here, and leave the poisonous stink of his beastly presence behind him? Oh, I know," as she put up a hand to stop him, "I daresay you think me unrefined, but at any rate I am a man, and not a mere shilly-shallying, whining hound like that. What is it, Elizabeth? For God's sake let me help you! What has he ventured to say?"

But the effort to tell Eric all the indignation she felt had been too much for her nerves, and she sat down and sobbed helplessly.

Michael felt distracted. He did not know what to do. He wondered how he could stay this paroxysm of

crying, and finally came to the wise conclusion that he had better wait until the force of her grief was spent.

Then he stood with his back to her, looking out of the window. Presently the sobs grew fainter, and Elizabeth sat like a tired child, and tried to speak, but it was an evident effort, and she almost gasped for breath between her words.

"Michael, dear old friend," she said, "you will forgive me. I have made a fool of myself, but—it has been so horrible—and the awakening to what he really is has been so hideous."

He turned and went to her and took her hand. Little by little she grew calmer, and, by questions and answers, he at last got from her the gist of the interview.

"He wanted," said Michael slowly, "to allow Lady Cliffe to imagine that you had some love affair with her husband, in order that she might think badly of him, and that it might never appear that Errington had been engaged to you himself?"

Elizabeth nodded; she had no voice to speak.

"I always thought badly of him, but I could never have conceived anything so mean. What did you promise?"

"I said I did not wish to remember that he ever lived," said Elizabeth in a whisper.

"But all the same you would remain under this odious accusation? I could never have imagined such real villainy, the damned cub!' said Michael almost under his breath.

Then he said no more about him, but tried to comfort Elizabeth. He told her to do as she had said—forget him.

"After all, the Christian Scientists have one great truth, and that is, that the mind should never be allowed to think of anything evil or ugly. Try to feel that you

loved a beautiful ideal whom you created; it was not this man. It was all that was great and good and pure in you that gave him qualities which were not his, but your ideal must not be destroyed, you must not let him shatter it."

Elizabeth listened quietly. It seemed to her as though feeling were numbed, as if she had outspent emotion, and had no more affection to expend on anyone.

"Don't let him spoil your life, Betty. You have so many useful years before you." And as he said the words, he felt how prosaic and tiresome they sounded, but it was hard to know how to brace and comfort her.

"I am not going to be foolish, Michael," she said. "Indeed I am not; only give me time, just a little time."

When Michael left Marshom Street he went to the nearest post-office, and asked for a directory. Looking carefully through the C's, in that section which calls itself the Court Guide, he scribbled down a number in Hill Street, Berkeley Square. Then he went out into the street. He was in no undecided mood. He knew what he intended to do, and had no hesitation whatever as to the wisdom of his plan, for it appeared to him the only straightforward course.

* * * * *

Katherine was sitting at her breakfast the morning after her return to London. Eric had dined with her the night before. He was not well, she thought; he had been moody and sad all the earlier part of the evening, and had devoted all the latter part to endeavoring to shake her decision as to the date of their marriage.

She had settled it was not to take place till the autumn; he prayed that it might be in the early summer. Why delay? It was a mere conventionality, He had pleaded so well, that at last she agreed to a compromise; she would be married in August. It would be a very quiet

wedding; everybody would be out of town. Besides, after all, she thought, what does it matter whether or no I respect Jack's memory? It is all a sham. I have no real respect for him, why should I pretend?

Then Eric began to make plans to occupy the time between this and August. Why not go away? Shut up the London house and live between Lentham and Ilbury? It would be delicious, a quiet summer in the heart of the country.

"No, Eric," she persisted, "you will get tired of me before the time. There is a glare in the country on mind and body, which shows up all defects. Let us stay here and see people, and meet every day. There are all sorts of charming things, music and plays, which we can do together. We will keep the country as a luxury, not for a steady diet."

"Just as you like," said Eric, yielding reluctantly, with a strong foreboding of ill. The summer, he knew, would be a time of constant anxiety.

But Katherine, calmly eating buttered roll, and reading the *Morning Post*, was supremely unconscious of the mental trial through which he was passing.

She was dressed in a long loose morning gown, with a deep collar and soft and very beautiful lace. She still wore black, and her fair hair and white skin, with its effect of opal and gold, was enhanced by the sober setting.

Her maid was standing in the room with some hats in her hand.

"Lady Hornden has sent these for your ladyship to see. She says she thinks they are what you want just now, miladi."

The woman laid a slight emphasis on the words "just now" which was not lost on Katherine. She looked up and said:

"Yes, I daresay she is right; she is always infallible about dress. Let me see."

The hats were exaggerated, tortured and twisted, with none of the simplicity of line which is not a question of fashion but rather a knowledge of art. Katherine stood up before the glass, and threw them down one by one.

"They are all horrible! Tell Lady Hornden I could not wear them. I look like a monkey without his organ."

The maid looked shocked.

"Give her my love," Katherine corrected herself, "and say that they really don't suit me; and she would think so, too, if she saw them on."

The man-servant came in to fetch the breakfast tray.

"Please, my lady, there is a gentleman. He says he wants to speak to your ladyship very perticler."

"Is he a tradesman, or what?" said Katherine.

"Well, my lady, I reely couldn't say. 'E's dressed like some sort of a hartist; looks to me more like that than a gentleman."

"Oh, I expect it's the man who is to restore the pictures at Ilbury. Yes, show him up," said Katherine. "Bundle all those hats out," she said to the maid.

A few minutes later the door opened, and Michael was shown into Katherine's sitting-room.

She looked at him and thought at once that he was probably an artist. His clothes did not appear to her cut quite on the common pattern, but he certainly was a gentleman.

"I think you have come to see me," said Katherine, "about the Vandycks at Ilbury. Mr. Errington is coming later, but I have the description of the pictures here. Our idea is to take them out of the frames——"

"No, I have not come about the pictures," said Michael.

"I beg your pardon," said Katherine, turning round

from the writing-table where she was hunting among the papers. "I thought——"

She felt she had made a mistake. What was he? He could not be the surveyor of the Electric Light Company who had to undertake the work at Ilbury. She would hazard no more guesses. She wondered if she ought to ask him to sit down, but he gave her no time.

"I have come to see you, Lady Cliffe, on a matter which is important, as it concerns the good name of someone who is at present involved in an unjust and disgraceful way. My name is Fane. I am a neighbor of Mr. Errington's at Ilbury, and I should be grateful if I could have a few moments, if you can spare the time."

Fane, Fane— Where had she heard the name? Eric must have mentioned it.

"Do sit down, Mr. Fane," she said warmly.

Some little trouble among the tenants, she thought, as Michael obeyed her.

"I cannot well tell you how hard it is to me to come to you at such a time, but Mr. Errington has given me no choice. I must defend a woman who has no one else to do it."

She drew herself up stiffly and said:

"I don't understand. What woman?" But in her heart she knew. She only said the words as one might put up a hand to ward a blow. She felt intuitively he spoke of Elizabeth.

"I would far rather have left the explanation to Mr. Errington," said Michael, "but I can't trust him to tell you the details as fully as I wish. You brought a locket some time ago to Miss Maynell, and you asked her if it was hers, and she told you that she had given it to the man to whom she thought you knew it belonged. She had no idea that it had been brought to you by Major Guthrie, or that it had been found in Sir John Cliffe's

possession. She imagined you knew it belonged to Mr. Errington, and that she had given it to him when they were engaged, nearly two years ago. Mr. Errington called to inform her what had happened, and to beg her to conceal the fact that, when he was wounded and believed himself dying, he gave it to Sir John, and asked him to bring it back to England."

Katherine sat perfectly rigid. She had never moved since Michael began to speak.

"He begged her not to give him away," he continued, "as he said he was going to marry you, and that it would ruin his chances if the mistake was discovered; but I determined you should discover it, as I could not allow Miss Maynell to bear such a weight of calumny. I am very sorry I have been obliged to give you pain."

"What proof have you?" said Katherine, still sitting motionless.

"I knew of her engagement; everyone at Ilbury knew that he paid her attention. I could get a hundred proofs," said Michael; "but if you wish it, let me see Mr. Errington in your presence."

Katherine was silent. What had happened? Where was she? She felt like a person who had just recovered from a state of unconsciousness produced by an anæsthetic —dazed, undone, yet anxious to keep a strong hold upon herself as her senses slowly returned.

"Miss Maynell never met Sir John Cliffe in her life," said Michael doggedly. He felt the profoundest pity for this frail woman, but he was determined to do his work, and clear Elizabeth. "But if you doubt the facts I can get the duplicate locket which Mr. Errington gave to Miss Maynell. He has perhaps forgotten that she possesses it. I should not have known it, but her old nurse told me of the fact."

He spoke deliberately, and it seemed almost mercilessly.

"I shall not want any evidence," said Katherine. She longed to be alone, and Michael guessed her unspoken wish.

"Good-bye, Lady Cliffe," he said. "I wish I had not had so sad a task to perform. I feel that it has wounded you."

The tone was so kindly, and his honest eyes looked down on her so sorrowfully, that her pride yielded to the desire to find help from someone who was honest and true, as she instinctively felt this man to be.

"Oh, Mr. Fane," she said, "do you know what it is to have everything shattered before your eyes? When it first happened I thought I could build my life back again, and now, for the second time I am turned adrift. He has lied about the defenceless dead. Oh, it is horrible, horrible!"

But the very strength of the constraint she had put upon herself had made the tension too great, and she fell back in a dead faint.

Michael lifted her up and put her on the sofa, violently rang the bell, and stood before her in despair. What had he heard should be done? He could not remember. Ought her head to be high or low? Surely water should be dashed on fainting people. He had read that. He looked round distractedly. Then the servant came.

"Lady Cliffe has fainted," he said, "fetch the maid." And presently a whole army of servants surrounded the unconscious woman, and Michael walked down the stairs.

In the hall the two men met. Eric had come to keep an appointment with the celebrated picture restorer. All sorts of tradesmen were coming and going, so he evinced no surprise at seeing a man walk across the hall, although the hour was early; but as Michael turned to pick up his hat they stood face to face.

Eric almost lost his self-command. Then, quickly regaining his balance, he said:

"How d'you do, Fane? I did not know you were in London." But the extended hand was ignored.

"I have no acquaintance with you, Mr. Errington," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. When she has recovered, no doubt Lady Cliffe will tell you."

"You damned scoundrel, what do you mean?" said Eric, losing his self-control. "What have you been saying to Lady Cliffe? How dare you come to this house?"

"Stop a moment," said Michael, standing still and looking at him with unflinching eyes. "I have come to tell Lady Cliffe that her husband was not unfaithful, that Miss Maynell is a perfectly innocent woman, and that you are a blackguard who would betray the dead; and now I have done my duty."

He turned, crossed the hall, and was gone, and Eric was left alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

"I AM absolutely in despair," said Lady Hornden, sitting, four months afterward, in the summer gardens at Lentham. "I have been really almost beside myself with anxiety and trouble."

Sir James looked down on the ground, and drew patterns on the gravel with his stick. He murmured from time to time a few sympathetic ejaculations, as Lady Hornden grew more confidential.

"There is positively no one, dear friend," she said, "I could talk to as I have talked to you. Men are so absurdly matter-of-fact; they can't see the hidden springs, under the surface of life, which are the real power, and there have been so many causes at work to produce all this terrible trouble. Of course," she continued more fluently, "I told Katherine when she first came to tell me she had broken with Eric, that no one would ever understand; that she had changed so often, the chameleon wasn't in it. Then she told me some story about a lock of hair which was brought home with poor Jack's things, and it had turned out that it was some love affair of Eric's. It's all very involved, but the long and the short of the whole thing is, that she has broken off her engagement, and I warned her how much people would blame her; but she is so romantic. I don't mind romance, if people will only do the common-sense thing. They may talk as much as they like, it doesn't hurt anybody, and it's really rather nice and individual. But when it comes to upsetting all your life for some foolish fancies, I really have no patience."

"Lady Cliffe expects every man to be a sort of Sir Galahad. It's all very well, but the world would be an infernally dull place if there were no Lancelots—and others——"

"Of course it would," said Lady Hornden eagerly. Then she changed her tone, and the real trouble was apparent. "To tell you the truth, I wouldn't mind how often Katherine changed her mind if she was happy and gay about it all, just played a game of battledore and shuttlecock, which is *de son age*, and very natural, while she is young. But she is so miserable and so ill, I can't bear to see her. I am going up to consult a specialist with her to-morrow. She is a skeleton, and pale and listless. She cares for nothing, but just sits in her room half the day with her hands in her lap, thinking. I try to cheer her up and take her out, but even when she goes to the play, she doesn't seem to hear or see anything. She won't leave London or come here; she says she wants to be alone."

"Oh, that will all pass," said Sir James. "She'll get sick of that sort of *moated grange* existence. By-and-by she'll cheer up, and really, my dear lady, she could do much better. Eric Errington is, to my mind, an affected young ass. I've no patience with him, and you may be sure, apart from any little histories, she has grown sick of him. Women who are in love don't break with men because they learn there's been somebody in the field before them; not a bit of it. She's just tired of him. She'll come out all right. Get her to Homburg or Aix-les-Bains, and make her go through a cure, then she'll believe she's better, and will get quite well."

"You are always so full of wisdom," said Lady Hornden, looking gratefully at Sir James. "I daresay you're right; but I'm superstitious. I can't help it; it may be silly, but two things oppress me. Jack, poor old dear,

who was just a matter-of-fact Englishman, gave Katherine an opal engagement ring; and she broke her looking-glass the day she was married. They didn't tell me at the time, but I found it out afterward from the housemaid. This has always made me feel she was somehow doomed.

"Oh, tommy rot!" said Sir James unsympathetically. "Lady Cliffe has not been really unfortunate; she has got all her life before her. She is beautiful and rich, and she has a delightful mother." And as he turned and smiled, the wrinkles deepened round his eyes, but their expression was kindly.

Lady Hornden got up with a sigh. She did not appear convinced, and they walked toward the house, where she was entertaining a large party or guests.

The next day Lady Hornden arrived at Hill Street in time to meet Sir William Hayward, the celebrated specialist, who had been summoned to see Lady Cliffe.

Katherine sat in an arm-chair in her room, and her mother paced about while they were waiting for Mr. Graham, who had for years been their family doctor, to bring the great man upstairs. At last steps sounded in the passage, and the doctors were admitted.

Mr. Graham led the way, and introduced his more famous colleague. He was tall, a striking man, with that purring professional voice which is supposed to have a soothing effect on the patient, and inspire unhesitating confidence. Then followed the series of questions and answers, known to all who submit to a physician's consultation.

When the main symptoms were reached Sir William's manner changed. He asked in quick phrases for details and dates. His look became alert, and he appeared oblivious of the individuality of the sick person. It was the trail of the disease he was hunting, and he was lost to all other sense. How long had this state of things

existed? Mr. Graham had only been recently aware of it. Then he questioned Katherine, looking at her with keen kind eyes.

Lady Hornden tried to put in an occasional word, but he attached little importance to her interpolations. It was the patient who absorbed his thought.

At last he turned to Mr. Graham, and said:

"Well, I think you and I must have a little talk."

Katherine remembered the hundreds of times he must have repeated this sentence, and wondered how often he had said it with the knowledge of his own helplessness.

When they were gone Lady Hornden became more restless.

"Of course he may be a great man, but he is not infallible. If I am not satisfied I shall call in Lambert. He is magnificent, they say; upsets everybody's theories, and cures so many people that the other doctors hate him. I think this man has too much a sort of bottled all-wisdom appearance, to impress me. I, as your mother, must know about you better than anyone, but he would hardly let me speak."

Katherine sat listlessly in her chair.

"I don't care," she said. "I will see anyone you like, if they don't rout me out, and drive me hither and thither in search of the unattainable; I am content, only I want to be left alone. But remember, mama," she said, gathering strength as she spoke, "remember I mean to hear the truth. I am not going to be put off with all sorts of nonsense, as though I were a cowardly child. I want to know how things really are with me. You promise me, for I will know. I am ill, I think; I feel ill. It may be nothing, but I wish to be told everything there is to know."

By-and-by both doctors returned. Sir William had

resumed his first manner. He took a chair and held his hands together, and in a slow, sweet, pompous voice, he began to explain to her that he quite hoped to be able to gather strength back.

"You are weak; you want watching, and rest, and feeding."

Katherine listened, but said no word.

Sir William strung sentences together which appeared to mean very little.

"You will go into the country," he continued. He hesitated.

Lady Hornden was standing beside Katherine, and said decidedly:

"Her own home, of course; it is always open to her. Where better than to her mother?"

"Exactly. That would be the very thing. To your mother's country place," and the doctor turned again to Katherine, "and then you will have rest, and a simple treatment which I have arranged with Dr. Graham, to be given by one of our nurses, and then I hope, with time and care, we shall do wonders for you—wonders; only you must be patient, and give yourself up to rest and nursing." He turned to Mr. Graham and then to Lady Cliffe. "You have been admirably treated hitherto by my friend here, who will watch you and report to me. Good-bye," he said, extending his hand with a little curved swoop, which seemed to hint at a benediction, and then, turning to Lady Hornden: "I should like a word as to details of treatment with your ladyship." Another smile and he was gone.

Mr. Graham remained a moment to bend over Katherine in his most irritating way, and said:

"He has nothing but good to prophesy. We are going to make a splendid cure."

"Is that all he said?" Katherine looked at him

with large searching eyes. "You know I have told you before, I don't care. I only want to know how I really am."

The cross-examination to which Lady Hornden was subjected on her return was severe.

"What does he say is the matter with me?" asked Katherine.

"Oh, general weakness," said Lady Hornden vaguely.

"Nonsense, mama; that does not account for it," and she named the special symptoms which had arrested the doctor's attention.

"He is certain that it does," said Lady Hornden decisively. "He says weakness may produce anything, everybody knows it can."

"When shall I be well?" said Katherine.

"Oh, my beautiful, darling child, you will be well soon, only you must do every single thing he says, and then he is to see you again. I am just going to fetch Marguerite, I want to see her before she goes out shopping," and she almost ran from the room.

"They are deceiving me, but I will know," thought Katherine, as she lay back in her chair.

* * * * *

Eric sat in the club window. He looked out on the cabs and omnibuses and motors and carriages, and on the people walking on the pavements, but it was to him as a vain show. He saw none of them. Over and over again he had been wondering how best he could act. Katherine's note was in his pocket.

"Please do not come to me," she wrote, "I would rather not see you. I know the truth. I do not want to characterize your action other than to say that my ideas of confidence and of honor differ so widely from your own, that it will be best we should part. I have

no other word to add, except, that the suffering I must endure arises, I know, partly from my own folly in the past, and on that score the blame is not wholly yours.

"KATHERINE CLIFFE.

"P.S.—If these words appear to you hard, you must remember that there is nothing so bitter as to be deceived."

He had written at least twenty answers, and had destroyed them all. None were to his mind satisfactory. Directly he tried to explain the situation, the incident looked more regrettable. When he wrote of penitence, the words seemed unreal and strained. The only strong thing, he decided, was to be silent. There is a wonderful power in silence, he argued. The very uncertainty will keep me in her mind, and who knows that she may not think better of this absurdly strained situation, and come back to real life and take things as she finds them.

He was genuinely distressed. Never had he so nearly approached a sincere love as during these last months. There was something so appealing in that fragile figure, so delicate and dependent, and then of course there was so much besides. Life would have been so easy, so delightful. He would have had such scope for his taste and his talent. He was envied by everybody. He was the lucky man who had drawn a big prize. And now—confound it! How hard it is on a fellow—just one false step. It seems too heavy a punishment. And he puffed his cigarette and clenched the arm of the chair, as if he were in bodily pain.

What had he better do? He could not loaf about London; he must make some plans. But this consideration was interrupted by a voice behind him saying:

"Hullo Eric, old boy! I'm awfully glad to see you. You've had horrible luck. I hear she's broken off her engagement. Poor old chap!" And a small, well-

groomed man sat down astride on a chair, in front of him. No one else was in the room, so the greeting caused him no embarrassment.

The speaker was Lord Munro. When she first came out, he had himself admired Katherine, and had hoped to rebuild the fortunes of his impoverished house with her fortune. But apart from this sordid motive, he had a really sincere admiration for her beauty and charm, and had retained her friendship.

"It's deuced hard luck," he said again.

"Yes, it is, only you know, my dear fellow, I'm not sure I take it as final. She is a little changeable, and some officious fool told her a pack of stories, which she swallowed wholesale," said Eric. "But, still, I'm terribly cut up and the uncertainty is horrible."

"Her mother told me she was awfully ill," said the other man. "They've had a perfect bevy of doctors to see her, and she does not get any better. Poor Lady Hornden is half beside herself."

Eric sat up in his chair.

"I hadn't heard she was really ill." He looked white and worried. "After all," he thought, "perhaps she is fretting at the break. It may be a good thing. I fancy my not writing was rather a stroke." But out loud he said: "Do go round by-and-by and enquire. You see, I can't, although I am half mad with anxiety. I wish you'd tell Lady Hornden you have seen me. It is so hard to be shut out, and get no news. My dear fellow, I tell you it's breaking me up," and he got up, and for the moment he was so convinced of the truth of his words that his face looked drawn and wizened.

The other man was genuinely sorry for him.

"I can't bear it much longer," Eric went on. "I shall go to America in the autumn—anywhere, anywhere to get away."

"I'll be sure to tell her. She's a really kind sort, a bit silly, but good stuff," said Lord Munro. "Don't get ill yourself. I daresay you're right, and that things will all come round. Lady Cliffe was always a little exaggerated in her views. Nobody can afford to take romantic ideas in this every-day, jog-trot world. Got to take things as we find 'em," he said, with a cigarette between his teeth, in the intervals of lighting it. "Don't go to America, it's a horrible place, no sport and nothing to do. Where shall you hunt next winter? I've got awfully cosy little quarters, and a ripping stable near Uppingham. I wish you'd go in with me. I've got three spare loose boxes."

And then the conversation drifted on to horses and hounds, and the usual hunting talk, which is only of interest to the sportsman.

CHAPTER XXIV

LIFE was very monotonous to Katherine, as she lay on the sofa in her sitting-room at Lentham. She rose late, had her luncheon on the tray, walked as far as the garden attended by her nurse, or sat in her chair on the terrace, then returned to her sofa till dinner.

"I might be eighty-five," she said to her mother with a sorrowful little smile, "and yet you tell me every day that I am getting better."

"So you are, my darling," reiterated Lady Hornden; but the tone in which she said it was not convincing. "What you need is rousing, you mope far too much. I am hoping that a little brightness may come to you when Anne arrives, and a few others who will be here next week."

"Are there people coming?" said Katherine despairingly. "I am so sorry. I want to be quiet; I am so often in pain, and always in discomfort. Until I am better, don't ask me to see anyone."

"My sweet child, you are morbid," said Lady Hornden. "You are not yourself. It is quite unnatural that you should shut yourself up. After all, even if you are not well, you can be charmingly dressed. A soft tea-gown with plenty of lace, or one of Doucet's *saut de lit*, is just as pretty as any gown. Indeed, illness is quite interesting, if it is not disfiguring. It will be a joy to them to see you, and my crushed flower will lift up her head, more beautiful than any of them," and she made a brave show of mirth.

"Oh, it isn't clothes," said Katherine, clasping her

hands together, and looking out beyond her mother. "The fact is, the people don't interest me; I don't want to see them. I don't care to hear them talk; it's always the same thing, and it's deadly dull and commonplace. Well, perhaps I don't know what I want," said Katherine, as she saw her mother look pained and puzzled. "I daresay it will be all right, only I am so tired, and I can't find rest anywhere."

When her mother left her, she lay back and closed her eyes. She saw a wide sweep of country, fading away into the long streaks of blue, a broad field and a narrow path, and she heard again the cracked voice of an old woman saying:

"They're a-carlin' of us, they're a-carlin'."

"I wonder if they are?" she thought.

By-and-by, when the expected guests came to Lentham, even Lady Hornden saw that it was too much for Katherine. She became more restless and nervous, and her nurse was disturbed. She was "losing ground," she said.

Dr. Graham was summoned from London, and it was finally arranged that sea air would be the best restorative, and that Katherine was to go away, accompanied only by her nurse.

A large cottage was taken on the east coast of Kent, and Katherine, with a retinue of servants, began that search for health which takes us over such weary and often unending ways.

She had not seen Elizabeth since her interview with Michael, neither had she written. It seemed to her impossible to re-open the question. She had bitterly repented her hasty judgment, and had again and again called out into the silence, to beg Jack's forgiveness, but no assurance came in answer to her appeal. But although the tide of her love and respect for him had

swept back over her life, she still felt a resentment toward Elizabeth which she could not overcome. She had caused her, unintentionally, she admitted, untold suffering. Why had she not frankly told her of her engagement to Eric? she unreasonably argued. It would have saved all misunderstanding.

It was unjust, she almost admitted to herself, to extend no forgiveness to Elizabeth, but the thought that she had not always held, as she imagined, supreme sway over Eric, annoyed her. She had always believed that the romance of his life centred in her, and with the sensitiveness of those who possess other than personal attractions, she began to think that possibly her fortune had played a larger part in his desire to marry her than in reality it had. She still felt a mistrust of Elizabeth's sincerity, and consequently a bitter dislike to the interests with which she had surrounded herself. Michael had seemed to her straightforward, but he only sought to vindicate Elizabeth; she had occupied the position of importance in his mind, and although he had been sorry for her own pain, it was a necessary evil he had inflicted, in order to gain her justification.

She thought constantly of Eric, and of the long days they had spent together, and although her heart had resumed allegiance to her unseen love, her soul cried out for the expression of it which she had found with Eric, for the sense of protection which his presence gave her, for the spoken word and the warm, living touch. Then she remembered how he had deceived her. She would spell over in memory every word that bore on his misrepresentation of Jack, and it seemed to Katherine as though she loathed the very love for which she craved. The silence he had maintained had troubled her. She had sent him one short note, immediately after she recovered strength enough to write, after her interview

with Michael Fane. But since that day never by word or by letter had he sought to change her decision, or to justify his conduct.

Perhaps he was wise. What was there to say? But still, she would have preferred to have had some recognition or remonstrance. It was like throwing a letter out into the dark. She would even have been glad to hear that he was angry, if only she could hear something. But it was like Eric; he was always complicated and mysterious.

Then she turned once more to the thought of Jack. She remembered that during the short year they were together, the honest expression of his love had sometimes bored her; but now she realized that in spite of this, she trusted in him implicitly and believed in him, and there was the solid rock which is the foundation of all lasting love.

The thousand ways in which he had shown his devotion to her came to mind, little acts, unnoticed at the time, but full of that deference which a strong man feels for the woman who gives herself into his care. She longed passionately to picture him in that strange region beyond. Had he carried his love for her yonder? Had he forgiven her? It almost seemed to her that now and then she caught some glimpse of the way out of the haunted chamber of memory, into those wide places where dreams mingle with reality, and time and eternity are one, as she lay in the little garden in the cool of the summer evening, listening to the hiss of the returning tide.

By degrees the invigorating air brought to Katherine some fresh strength, and with it came a greater interest in her surroundings. At first the presence of the nurse was a comfort, and it was a rest to leave herself in her hands; but when she had thoroughly established an

invalid routine, the thraldom began to be unspeakably irksome. She had, however, no other companionship, and she became the only human interest.

During the tedious process of daily electric massage Katherine would listen to her talk with a mixture of weariness and amusement, and would question her about her life and her hospital experience. Then she would try and extract her opinion as to her own progress toward health; but here she came on a professional bedrock.

"Am I better, nurse?" she would say, after the daily weighing. "Have I gained anything?"

"We can never tell our patients; we are never allowed to give particulars," said the nurse mysteriously.

"But you can tell me what you think," said Katherine peevishly. "It's absolutely ridiculous."

"You mustn't think at all, my lady," she would answer. "You have been a very good patient up to now. You must ask Dr. Graham next time he comes."

"What did Dr. Graham tell you was the matter with me?" queried Katherine.

"He told me just what he told you."

"Oh, that is nonsense," she replied impatiently. "That does not account for the symptoms you are watching. He only said it was weakness, and that I should grow stronger."

"That was just what he told me," said the girl diplomatically.

Katherine looked suspicious and said no more, but the nurse, although reticent about Katherine's ailments, was certainly not reserved about her own experiences. The "cases" she had attended were minutely described; the triumphs she had achieved over disease, the recoveries which were the direct result of her care, were all told in detail. Her "gentlemen patients" appeared to be the most interesting charge.

"I have never had any trouble with them," she said, as she kneaded Katherine. "They are lovely to me." And a little reminiscent smile played round her mouth. "Sir William, for whom I have nursed a lot, said, 'You're the very nurse for gentlemen; I would trust the most difficult case to your care and tact.'"

"Aren't they impatient and troublesome sometimes?" Katherine questioned.

"Oh dear no; not after the first. I have sometimes a good bit of bother with the wives; they want to be fussing in and out, but I won't have it. After operation cases I keep them out altogether."

"Don't the husbands ask for them?" said Katherine.

"Not after a bit," said the little nurse.

She was young and rather good-looking, and Katherine pictured the wives frenzied with anxiety and jealousy, haunting the ante-chambers guarded by this relentless little siren.

"You see, we get a good deal behind the scenes. Gentlemen have often thanked me for allowing no one to come to them. Very often the wife worries them, and they can't tell her so. We see rather amusing things sometimes."

"Rather squalid, I should think," said Katherine.

"Oh, not now," said the nurse. "I've given up all district work, since I finished my training. I never nurse anyone but people of good family."

"That would not prevent it," said Katherine; but she did not trouble to explain to her that she felt there was just as much squalor among rich people, as poor, and that it is not only outward dirt which makes things squalid.

At other times she would ask her minutely about her hospital life, about the out-patients and the sick.

"Do the doctors tell poor people the truth?" Katherine questioned.

"Not always," said the nurse, "it depends. If they really want to know, because they ought to, then of course they tell them, but not otherwise. Still, they are more open with them than with private patients, no doubt."

Katherine made her describe again and again with the utmost minuteness all the details of the hospital routine.

"Now tell me from the beginning," she would say. "A woman comes with a letter—what is it you call it? Yes, an out-patient's letter, and she has to sit hours and hours."

Then the nurse would explain the hospital regulations, and she would question and cross-question her on every detail. Sometimes the nurse wondered at her great eagerness, but finally settled that she perhaps intended to leave money to the charity, or build a new ward, and so she took pains to give her all the information she demanded.

The nurse prided herself that she could generally "place" her patients, but Katherine completely mystified her. She was young, she was rich, and she was beautiful. She possessed more expensive clothes than any she had ever seen. Every wish that she expressed was gratified, and yet she seemed to care for nothing. It was certainly a bad sign, and the woman wondered why she showed no desire to see her friends. The loss of her husband might account for this apathy. Her grief might have shattered her, for the disease from which she was suffering would not yet have so undermined her strength as to hinder her desire for change and enjoyment. But she had never spoken of her grief, or behaved in the manner bereaved people invariably did, according to her experience. It was very odd, she would say to herself; and a feeling of profound pity almost akin to contempt

possessed her, when she thought how little use this woman made of the good things of life which were scattered round her in such profusion.

The object of her pity was, however, supremely unconscious. Katherine was low-spirited and nervous. The future had for her no charm; the past seemed to be a series of mistakes. She held the threads of life with tired fingers, and had no energy to disentangle the skein.

* * * * *

August is a deadly month in the slums. While other children scamper over the heather or paddle by the sea, the children in the court sit on the baking steps, leaning weary heads against the door, too tired or too ill to play. Many a child drops out of the ranks before the spell of heat is over.

Elizabeth longed for change and country, but decided to remain in Marshom Street until late in the autumn. She felt she could not leave the children, and it seemed to her that one place was the same as another. She too had little desire for enjoyment, besides which she had many cases of illness in the district, and the work was heavy.

Billy had returned. He was mysterious as to where he had spent his time. His hair was clipped close to his skull, and his ears stood out like handles. His shirt and waistcoat were sizes too small for him now. "They fits me too soon," he explained to Elizabeth; and his trousers ended in a fringe.

He had got some work at a greengrocer's, and with all the deficiencies of his attire hidden under a long and dirty apron, he scrubbed the doorsteps of the little shop at the corner of the court, unpacked the hampers of cauliflowers and cabbages, and carried boxes of bananas, with an air of solemn importance.

Sally used to hover round the shop, but Billy, with

true professional instinct, took no notice of her until work was over. He was only employed in the mornings, so in the afternoons they would go off together to the "burying ground"; there were trees there and little patches of grass, and they used to sit and listen to the stories told by the other children, of their experiences in the country. Many of them had been away for a fortnight, and brought back glowing tales of the flowers to be had for the picking, of the fields "where yer could tumble 'ead over 'eels withaout no bloomin' copper chasin' yer," of the "sneaky green grass wot nipped yer bare legs," while the brother and sister sat and drank in every word.

Elizabeth, mindful of the boy's disappointment, and the tragic sequel, had promised that if possible she would try and get them away, but there were many sick, and their turn had not come before the funds were exhausted. One never to be forgotten day, however, she had given them sixpence, and they went for a ride on the tram as far as Leytonstone. Then they got out and walked along the road toward the forest. They could not go very far, but they had seen trees and grass, and "little white flowers wot grew among it," and Mr. Green had given them some rotten fruit instead of throwing it away; so they sat down and had a splendid time "a-eatin' of them plums and bernardos," as Sally afterward described it.

But the weather grew hotter, and Sally fell sick. Billy did all he could for her. He used to take her every day to the "buryin' ground" and put her under a tree. She was too ill to eat, but she enjoyed the cold water from the drinking fountain, and she lay there until he came to fetch her in the evening when the cemetery was closed.

Elizabeth heard of Sally's illness from Billy, when he was taking down the shutters early one morning,

and she hastened off to find Sally under her tree. She sat down beside her. The child was very white. She took the bit of cake of Elizabeth brought her, and tried to eat it in order to please her, but it was an effort. Her head ached badly, and Elizabeth asked her about her nights.

"We've slep' out, Billy an' me, most 'o nights. Mover's bin boozed, an' took the key wif 'er, so we couldn't git in. Oh no, we likes it," in answer to Elizabeth's question as to whether the doorstep was not very hard. "Billy lies on 'is back, and 'e looks at the stars, 'e does, a big 'un and two little 'uns, and 'e says the little 'uns winks at 'im, but the big 'un just looks clear at 'im, it does. Worst on it is, mofer comes back boozed, an' last night when she seed us she kicked Billy, and she 'it me, an' she siys as it was a disgrice to 'er, us sleepin' outside; an' Billy an' me cried out, an' Mrs. Jones she put 'er 'ead out of the winder, and she asted mofer ef she warn't fit ter look arter 'er children, she did, and she called 'er nimes. And mofer in course she turned, and we 'ad a job ter keep 'er from goin' at 'er. 'Wicked, meddlin' ole cat,' she said she'd tear ivry 'air out of 'er 'ead."

Sally repeated the every-day occurrence in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice.

"Oh, Billy, 'e is good ter me," she said, as Elizabeth changed the subject. "'E's right down good ter me. Iver since biby died, 'e's bin that kind, 'e 'as."

Then Elizabeth tried to draw her thoughts away from the court, and the dirt, and the drink. She told her about fields, and birds, and flowers, and how next year she hoped to get her away.

Sally listened. Her face was small and very white. She had an old, worn, anxious look, and there were some wrinkles already round her dark eyes. Her gown, if it could be dignified by such a name, consisted of a

torn and sleeveless bodice, and a skirt which draggled at her heels; a rusty black cape stretched across her narrow shoulders, succeeded in covering her arms to her elbows, and a shapeless pair of boots, which belonged to her mother, covered her feet.

She sat there, so sad a little figure, that Elizabeth's heart went out to her with infinite pity. What could this life hold for her? she thought. So she began talking to her about the world where it was always country, which nobody had spoiled.

"Ain't no pine there?" said Sally, looking up sharply.

"No," said Elizabeth, "and nobody's ever drunk there or naughty."

"Nobody's boozed? Why, wo' goes ter the public 'ouse?" she asked. "Ain't none?" she questioned. "Why, that's funny!"

Then Elizabeth talked of the great Painbearer who understood all about her weakness. Sally listened, but there was a doubting expression on her face. Then they fell to talking about the graves and the great mystery of death.

"Is they all 'appy?" asked Sally. "Is they all a-livin'?"

"Yes, they're happy," said Elizabeth, "or else they're learning more lessons which will teach them how to be happy."

Again Sally looked doubtful.

"The old woman as mide me puddings when I was bad told me as God burned bad people to red 'ot cinders." She looked up as though she had caught Elizabeth this time. "She says as 'ow ef yer tells lies yer gets burned up."

Elizabeth tried to improve Sally's theology, but seeing that her statements were taken with some measure of reserve, she began "reading the writing" with Sally on the different tombstones.

"This is the one I loikes," said Sally, pointing with her thin dirty little hand, as she read aloud in a slow, nasal voice:

> "Who best can drink 'ee's cup of waoe
> Triumfat over pyne,
> Who pashunt bears 'ee's cross belaow,
> 'E follows in 'ee's tryne."

Elizabeth's eyes were dim. "The steep ascent to heaven" seemed to her a toiling journey, but this frail little figure had a harder path to travel. Perhaps it will be shorter, she thought, as she kissed the pale thin cheek, and told her she would come again.

"Mind yer do," said Sally smiling.

On her way home Elizabeth saw Michael coming toward Marshom Street. She had seen a great deal of him lately. He had been in and out more than usual. He had, however, told her nothing at all about his interview with Katherine, but he said casually one day that he had heard that her engagement with Eric was broken, and Elizabeth imagined that after all perhaps Eric had the grace to tell her the truth, but her hero worship was ended. She had seen Eric in a new and very different light, and she mourned only the loss of an ideal which she now recognized had no relation to reality. But still her heart was sore. Her very mistake brought with it a sense of humiliation, although she tried resolutely to turn to her work, and had already begun to plan for the coming winter with renewed energy. Her dream was over, she told herself. She could, therefore, no longer afford to be drowsy. Life must be lived, and realities faced, but the world seemed very gray. Still, there were moments when she recognized that the awakening was good. She knew that it was inevitable, but it might have come too late, and she allowed herself no illusions as to Eric's character.

Elizabeth wondered why she did not hear from Katherine. Surely she owed her some word to tell her of her mistake. She resented the silence at first, and then she heard of her illness through Lady Augusta, and was filled with pity and a real desire to be allowed to comfort her.

Michael looked worried and anxious as he stopped in the entrance of the court to speak to her, and in his hand he held a telegram.

"I have had bad news. Mother is ill," he said, "and I am off to Ilbury by the next train."

"How ill?" said Elizabeth quickly. "Not seriously?"

"Yes, I am afraid so. The telegram is from Dr. Hood, and he asks me to come to her. She must be very ill," he said, and his voice trembled a little, "not to send herself."

"How soon is your train?"

"Now, at once. I am just going to Liverpool Street. Betty, if she wants you, you will come, won't you?"

"Yes, any moment," said Elizabeth. "Only do send at once if I can help her."

"Shall I take a message?" he said, still lingering.

"Tell her, Michael, how I love her. That is the only message worth taking to anyone."

"God knows you're right," said Michael, as he turned to go.

CHAPTER XXV

As autumn advanced the October wind was often too boisterous for Katherine to sit in her garden with comfort.

"Only the very young and the very prosperous like wind," she said, as the awning of her little wooden shelter filled and flapped with a strong gust.

"Then I am sure, my lady, you ought to like it," said the nurse.

The remark was intended to please, but Katherine, wrapped in furs, with her face as white as the ermine of her cloak, laughed a little bitterly, and said:

"The number of our years doesn't make us young, and prosperity doesn't mean money. Haven't you learnt that?"

But the woman thought it best to keep to generalizations, and said:

"Call me if you're cold, please, as you must not get a chill," and, putting her book down by her side, she left her.

Katherine looked out over the expanse of sea where long green lights were stretching across the dark gray water. The wind bowed the heads of the dahlias and michaelmas daisies almost to breaking point. The little stunted trees shook beneath it, bent and dwarfed by their battles with this strong enemy. The seagulls were screaming and darting down to the waves, then as they reached the water they sank upon it, quietly swimming as though rocked by a careful hand. The great sea heeded not the wind. The infinite strength of the

waters struck her afresh. The wind battered only the weak things, but strength gave calm.

When she looked back on her life, during this time of leisure, everything seemed dwarfed and puny. She longed for things that were big and enduring.

"I shall make new interests," she thought, "solid things that won't fail, if——"

How strange that word had lately come into her life. Formerly she had just settled what she meant to do, or be. Was there, then, something so strong that, like the sea, it could resist the currents of our will, she wondered.

On the following day Dr. Graham came from London to see her. His visits were a source of aggravation to Katherine. The whispered talks in the adjoining room with the nurse, and the futile accounts she afterward gave of the conversation, annoyed her almost past bearing.

This time, however, after the usual mysterious consultation, he returned to her, and taking a chair he bent toward her, and said:

"I hope you will believe implicitly what I am going to say. You are better, decidedly better. Your strength has gained, and your general condition much improved, but I should like you to see Sir William again. I don't want the responsibility of your winter plans, and I should be glad if you would authorize me to ask him to come. Moreover, we may have to consider whether we can help you before you go abroad."

"Why don't you talk English?" said Katherine in a hard, dry voice. "Why don't you say outright that you may operate? I know just what you are thinking; I am no fool and no coward."

"My dear Lady Cliffe, you are one of the very best patients——" but Katherine interrupted the coming compliment.

"I shall, of course, arrange to see Sir William, but

not here. I shall go to London. You say I am stronger, so I can easily bear the journey, and I prefer it."

The nurse, who was standing in the room, shook her head, and Katherine, looking at her, and then at the doctor, said:

"I mean to go, so that ends it."

Three days later, Katherine found herself in Hill Street. The house looked deserted, but the library on the ground floor had been hastily arranged, and flowers from Lentham made the room cheerful.

On the following day after her arrival the consultation was held. Sir William brought with him another celebrated specialist, and the three doctors examined and cross-examined the patient, giving no hint as to their opinion, and finally retired for their conference.

The excitement and pleasure of the nurse was an added annoyance to Katherine. Lady Hornden had come to London in order to be present, and endeavored while they were waiting to get out of her all the information that she could.

What did she think the doctors would say?

She could not tell. She did not know, and even if she had her own opinion, she was not at liberty to say it.

"Has she gained any weight?" asked her mother.

"Well, yes, perhaps a little, I think," she said, smiling at Katherine. "We have gained two pounds, but we have been very good. Sir William ought to give us a medal for perseverance," she continued, but the dreary little joke did not make her patient smile. It gave Katherine a very real pleasure, however, when, on his return, Sir William said somewhat curtly: "You can go, nurse," and sat down by her.

"Well, dear lady," he began, "you are doing well. We should like you to go on just the same, to persevere.

We don't want to interfere with nature. Lady Cliffe has gained strength"—he said, turning to Lady Hornden —"gained strength," he repeated absently, still looking at Katherine.

"Well, that is a great deal in her favor, is it not?"

"De—cidedly; decidedly," he repeated.

But Katherine was not satisfied.

"Why can't you tell me what is the matter with me, if you know it," she added, "or are you in the dark?"

Sir William paused, put his hands together, looked up at the ceiling, and then, without meeting her eyes, said:

"It would be really almost impossible. These attacks of neuritis are so difficult to diagnose. The final recovery depends on general health. We must maintain that. You have youth on your side, and a desire to get well, and I believe that is the real secret of recuperation. By-and-by, perhaps, we may make searching analysis, but there is nothing to cause you anxiety. Keep a quiet mind and you will get strong."

He still did not look at her, and as she turned quickly to her mother, it appeared to her that she looked grave and rigid and, after shaking hands, Sir William left the room with Lady Hornden.

In the afternoon Katherine was resting, lying on the sofa in the library. The nurse had gone for her afternoon walk. It was part of the hospital rules that she should have fresh air during the day. Lady Hornden was not expected till dinner-time, and it was only four o'clock. She got up and rang the bell, and when the servant came, sent for the housekeeper.

"What servants came up from the cottage, Blunt?" she said to the curtesying woman in black silk.

"The chef, my lady, and two 'ousemaids and one kitchenmaid, and the menservants."

"Did the other kitchen girl stay behind?"

"Yes, my lady, she did. I got a charwoman in to help in the scullery."

"Who is she?" questioned Katherine, to the surprise of Mrs. Blunt.

"She's a person as was recommended to me by Lady Augusta's 'ousekeeper. She comes from the East End, I believe, but reely I don't know, I never asked her. She's a very good woman to work."

"Tell her I want to speak to her," said Katherine.

The housekeeper looked dumb with surprise. "A char to go to the library!" It seemed impossible, but "when people is ill they takes all sorts of fancies," she thought, as she descended the stairs to the kitchen.

A quarter of an hour later a stout woman with a shiny face, round and motherly, was standing before Katherine. She folded her red swollen hands on her apron, and looked at her.

"There sat the lidy all dressed in lice with the beautifullest 'air yer ever see, but I knew as she was hill, very hill," she said, as she described the interview on her return home.

"I don't know what your name is," said Katherine, sitting up on the sofa.

"Mrs. Etherington," said the woman.

"Do you come from the East End?"

"Yes, yer lidyship."

"What do you get for your work here?"

"Three shillin's a diy and me food, yer lidyship."

"Have you children?"

"Yes, I've five little children, all a-goin' to school, an' my por 'usband 'e carn't do no work, 'e's bin bad this three year, a-goin' to the 'orspital once a week, an' the stuff as they give 'im ain't a-done 'im no good, but then they telled 'im so, they did. 'We can't do nothin'

for yer,' they says; an' ter-day I left 'im awful bad, and 'e cawfed that bad as I thought to see 'is lungs lay on the floor, I did, yer lidyship. It's the truf, every word as they said about 'im."

"Did they tell him the truth at the hospital?" said Katherine; and a slight color came into her face.

"They did, yer lidyship. They said as 'ow none but the Almighty could 'elp 'im."

"Look here, Mrs.——"

"Etherington," said the charwoman, as Katherine hesitated.

"I will give you five pounds if you will do just as I tell you. Please bring me to-morrow a bonnet, not your best, and a cloak or a shawl, and a pair of boots; but if you tell anybody in the house I shall not give you the money. I want to send a woman to the hospital, and she has nothing to wear."

"She can't be right in 'er 'ead!" thought the woman, eyeing Katherine; but the thought of five pounds made it worth while to humor a lunatic.

She quickly passed her scanty wardrobe in review. Her dolman with the beads had been deposited in pawn some time back, at the corner shop. She could borrow a bit to get it out. Her bonnet wasn't up to much, but she'd clean it to-night, and as to her boots, well, Mrs. Davey as "lived above 'er was an obliging body, she would 'elp 'er for a shillin'" she felt sure. So she promptly replied that everything should be ready.

"Put it in a brown paper parcel and tie it up, and leave it on the hall table."

"Yes, yer lidyship," said the woman. "I'll put it in the 'all directly I've cleared the breakfast."

Katherine looked puzzled.

"I don't have breakfast in the hall."

"No, yer lidyship, but the servants does."

"Oh, I see," said Katherine. "No, I mean the front hall here, not the servants' hall. Ring the front door bell and put it there."

"I 'ope as you'll explain, yer lidyship, ter Mrs. Blunt as I took no liberty. I shouldn't like for to lose my bit o' work."

"I'll take care of that," said Katherine.

The next morning Katherine stood ready dressed to go out at eleven o'clock.

"I shall want that in the brougham," she said to the servant, pointing to a rather bulgy-looking brown paper parcel on the hall table.

The footman lifted it gingerly and placed it in the carriage.

"I shall not want the nurse. Tell her to go out. I may be late coming back," she added.

The man waited for orders at the brougham door.

"Go toward the City, I can't remember the address," she said; and the horses' heads turned eastwards.

When she got to Aldgate Station she stopped the carriage, told the coachman to wait, and called a cab.

An hour later a tall figure with a rusty black mantle and a black velvet bonnet, on which quivered a shabby jet ornament, a plain black skirt, some worn and shapeless boots, and a pair of clean, well-made gloves, took her place among the out-patients of the great hospital.

The room was nearly full. The people sat on hard benches, grouped under the printed names of the various doctors who were to see them. She would be called when her turn came, the porter explained, when she presented her letter.

Katherine crouched down, fearful of even raising her head. Her heart beat very quickly; she had never felt so alone in her life as in this dreary crowd.

By-and-by she began to take an interest in the people

round her—pale anæmic faces, with the desparing look of those haunted by the knowledge that, if health failed, their one asset in life was gone. Hunger and ill-health had brought many of the impotent folk to this modern Bethesda; drink and debauch had sent others; disease and age had added their list. Many little children were among the waiting crowd. Some toddled in and out of the benches, lifting up grimy faces, and smiling at the sorrow-laden strangers; children with heads bandaged, telling of burns or bruises, with bent legs or wasted frames; tiny babies as white as wax, in their mothers' arms, who cried unceasingly as the hours went on.

"There, deary, don't yer cry; you shall 'ave it by-and-by," said a woman with a baby wrapped in a dirty, tattered shawl. "She likes 'er little sip, and misses it, she do. I lets 'er finish the glast, I does, it mikes 'er sleep a bit," she said, with some pride to her neighbor on the bench, as she patted the yelling child.

A murmur of voices filled the room, as in low tones the sick people were telling each other of their different diseases, or explaining the peculiar illness of the relation they had brought.

Katherine sat quite silent. Never had she felt the horror of physical suffering to be so unbearable. The sisters in their pretty dresses and clean aprons, with streaming ends to their caps, flitted in and out; occasionally they stopped and noticed a child, and asked the mother about its age, but their cheerful interest is only surface, thought Katherine; how can they care, when they meet this army of suffering every day. The doctors in white linen coats came in and out of the consulting-rooms, and spoke to each other or to the sisters on the business of the morning.

The hours dragged on. Two o'clock had struck, and still she had not been called. Katherine felt in-

expressibly weary and faint. She tried to gain courage by the thought that if she were really told that nothing serious was the matter, she could go back to the world and do some real good. She must help these people, she thought, as she looked round on them, as they sat there waiting in hopes that their burden of suffering might be taken from them. The sadness and horror of the picture were not lost upon her, and her vivid imagination filled up the blanks.

"It's a long time ter wite," said a pale-faced man sitting opposite to her across the narrow gangway which divided men from women. "I've bin 'ere since ten this morning. No, I've got no work; I kep' on as long as I could, and then I 'ad to give in. The wife she went aout washing, and lucky she was ter get it," and a hollow cough which shook the bench on which he sat, interrupted him. "I've bin in 'ere for a month, but they couldn't keep me no longer; said there wasn't no 'ope; but I come 'ere to-diy ter try an' get a drop o' medicine for ter mike me sleep, I'm that bad," and he coughed again.

"Yes, it's a awful time ter wite," said the woman next to her. "I'm a-comin' in, I think. I've got to see the doctor to get a horder. They hoperate, they siy, on me next week," and she sniffed and wiped her nose on her shawl. "It's very 'ard, I 'as foar little 'uns, and my eldest girl as minds them's only ight. My 'usband works at the brewery, but 'e don't git much wiges."

Katherine listened. The walls of this house of pain were closing round her. She seemed stifled by the sorrow which was in the very air. At last a sister came to her, took her paper and read it, and then led her into a room divided into two cubicles.

A young doctor was standing leaning against a high-back chair, intelligent and alert. He asked Katherine some questions in a short brisk way. She answered

in a few words, telling him the symptoms as briefly as she could. He asked her to step behind a screened partition and to remove her dress. When the beautiful silk underclothes were revealed under the dirty dolman, he looked across at the sister with a meaning glance, and she nodded.

He put more questions, and finally said:

"Dr. White is going his rounds now. You can see him before you go. I should specially like to pass you on to him; you must stay a little longer."

Then she wrapped her cape round her, and went back again to her dreary watch, sitting with the group who were to see this specialist.

Another hour, and both doctors were making minute examination, speaking quickly in low tones to each other.

"That is all," said the junior doctor to Katherine. "We will give you some tonic medicine."

"I want you to tell me the exact truth," said Katherine, standing very upright and pale, with her delicate features and fair curly hair surmounted by the ugly black bonnet. "I must know; the welfare of other people depends upon it—indeed, everything depends upon it."

"Who can she be?" thought the elder man. "She is not a working woman; her hands are delicate and white. She has shabby clothes but beautiful linen. What does it mean?" he wondered. "Could she be among the richer ranks of London's sorrowful army?" He could see no trace of such a career in her clear eyes and refined face. But many more were waiting, and he could not stay to think.

"Can I get well?" she asked, and stood there like a prisoner awaiting sentence. But there was to be no reprieve.

"We fear not. The disease is diffused, malignant

and advanced. We could do little good by operating. But you will not suffer pain."

"How long?"

"Oh, that must depend on how strength is maintained." The voice was kind.

"But—forgive me—under favorable circumstances, do you think a year?"

"Perhaps, yes, possibly a year."

Out in the broad street the cab was waiting. Her own cloak and hat lay on the seat, and a pair of pretty French shoes.

"Back to Aldgate Station," she said, as she shut the door, and mechanically took off the worn clothes.

The sun was shining, and the great hay-carts were rumbling slowly behind the tram-cars. The people were moving east and west, a constant stream of life.

A year—a year, she thought, as she watched the living panorama. She felt numb. It seemed to her that, after all, no great change had come to her, except that now nothing mattered; she need not trouble about plans, for nothing now was worth a thought.

But as she drew near Aldgate and paid the cabby, and got into her carriage, the very familiarity of her own intimate surroundings, her cardcase and notebook, the paper she had read in the morning, made her realize the real force of the news she had heard. She took the looking-glass out of the case in front of her, and looked at her face. Somehow it appeared to her as though she had never seen herself before. She looked with curiosity at the large bright eyes which met her, the perfect oval of cheek and chin, the transparent skin with its almost waxy texture, and the soft fluffy hair which moved a little in the draught from the open window.

A year—and nobody would see it any more; it would all be hidden away, shrunken, horrible, loathsome to look

upon. She put up her hand and touched her cheek. It seemed incredible. Where would she be—Katherine—who was so real? And she tried to set her ideas in order.

Another life. The thought had always been perfectly vague—something to do with angels and golden thrones. Fra Angelico's beautiful "Paradiso" came to her mind. A copy hung in her bedroom—happy winged beings dancing with joyous monks, whose days of penance ended, were revelling in the pure delights of the new Eden. It was a charming piece of naive art, but it had no appeal to her; it brought no sense of reality. If that was heaven, she had no desire for such happiness. Perhaps, then, there was no future. She wondered. Jack had never answered her when she called to him. All had been a blank silence. The idea of passing to nothingness did not seem to terrify her, only she was filled with an infinite pity for herself, that she should so soon leave a world that had given her such a capacity for happiness, and snatched it away so soon.

She thought of the days she had lived only a year ago, of the sunshine, the sweep of the keen air, the strange sense of completeness which filled those hours when Eric was beside her, and they rushed on and on through the peaceful land, content to be thus side by side in the lovely country world. Poor Eric! Resentment seemed to have died on the hospital steps. What a pity he should have so spoiled his soul and hurt his honor for such a fleeting thing as her short life.

Her tears were falling now. After all, she thought, it is perhaps just as well as it is; he would have been even more unhappy if we had married. And a sense of utter desolation swept over her with the knowledge that no human hand could help her, that she stood on the threshold of that gate which leads to the Unknown, through which each must pass alone.

They were driving through the City now, and the gray walls of London's great cathedral rose before her. Flying pigeons swept across the grim stone buttresses, and were lost in the mysterious shade which wrapped the angles. Great and still amid the roar and movement it stood, the monument of things immutable.

She pressed the little button which bade the coachman stop, and when the servant opened the door, with slow steps she ascended the long stone stair, pushed open the heavy door, and stood for a moment filled by the sense of space and calm. She looked down the broad aisle to the dim chancel where the shadows hung like blue draperies. The sense of vastness began to disappear as the building became more familiar, and finally she was aware of a growing feeling that this too seemed dwarfed and puny, in comparison with the immeasurable space toward which she was hastening, and again a sense of desolate awe possessed her. Involuntarily her mind clung to the one being familiar to her, who was perhaps out beyond space, and, as she walked up the aisle and sank into a chair, her heart cried out:

"Oh, Jack, help me, do help me!" How long she sat almost immovable she did not know. Here and there other figures were dotted about, little black specks under the vast dome. An old man with bowed head was at her right. How still he is! she thought; but when she looked again she saw he was asleep. A few chairs from her own a woman sat, a heavy middle-aged face with many lines, and coarse gray hair drawn tight under her bonnet. She turned round for a moment when Katherine came in, and then looked again straight before her, dull-eyed and care-worn.

Presently a stream of light fell from an upper window across the sanctuary, and the shadows lifted as though drawn by unseen hands, and for one moment the sunlight

lit the figure of the Christ upon the Cross. Katherine noticed only the dramatic effect, the change from the blue dimness to this dazzling piercing shaft of quivering whiteness. Then her eyes rested on the illuminated figure, the embodied pain of all humanity.

"That has been the comfort of desolate men and women through the ages," she thought. "I wonder if it will be mine."

The woman near her had also seen the change of light. A long sigh came form her lips, as though she, also, wanted relief.

Katherine looked at her, and yielding to her impulse said:

"You are unhappy too."

The dull eyes turned to her. A faint color came into the yellow cheeks.

"I'm very ill," she said, "and I'm tired, and I came in 'ere to rest. I've got a daughter, and I have to work to keep her, but it's difficult to get, and I'm not much good they tells me at the places where I go."

"I'm ill too. I'm going to die," said Katherine, and she took the hand in the shabby glove. The very contact with a human being seemed to bring relief. The woman looked at her wondering.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Its 'ard to suffer, and you're very young. I'm sorry."

The words were so kindly said, the tears came into Katherine's eyes. She turned to go, but stopped a moment and passed behind the woman's chair, and slipped a five-pound note into her lap.

"Take rest while you can get it," she whispered, and was gone. When she came out in the sunlight her heart was less sore.

CHAPTER XXVI

Miss Osterley with flying bonnet strings and a perturbed look on her face stood in Elizabeth's room.

"Called away, do you say, dear, to his mother? How unfortunate! I am very sorry. I had quite hoped he would have helped me about a most important case, one of the most flagrant I have come across. I am to go to the County Council about it. No, Father Martin's no use," in answer to Elizabeth's suggestion; "he is too timid. I must be plain," she said, standing with her hands clasped behind her, "besides which, he is steeped in all sorts of ecclesiasticisms about marriage, which narrow his views as to the rights of women. I have got beyond all that. I see quite plainly that our present system is utterly rotten."

Elizabeth tried to avert the explanations which she felt sure were coming.

"Can I do anything, Miss Osterley, to help you?"

"Well, it's hardly a case for you, I'm afraid; although I'm sure young women ought to know all the horrors that go on. In our society, we have some really very plucky girls, who go disguised to all sorts of places, and bring back most valuable evidence. Indeed, the very case I have now, was got for me by a girl younger than you. She——"

"Oh don't, Miss Osterley. I would really like to help you, but I don't want to be used as a sort of moral ferret to rout out horrors."

"That's where you're so cowardly, Elizabeth," said

Miss Osterley, pulling violently at her bonnet strings, and tying them into a hard stringy bow. "What other girls suffer you ought not to mind knowing; but, after all, you are all what men make you, just puppets trained to do their will, until you're sold into that moral slavery called marriage. Oh, I've no patience with these wretched conventionalities. Such things as I am attacking could not be, if every honest woman were not afraid of the opinion of some man, and would speak out. Well, I have very little time. I must go and meet the editor of the *Night Watch*. He is one of us, and is quite ready to organize a campaign."

At this moment Martha came in with a telegram.

"I expect it's from Mr. Fane, Miss Elizabeth. I should like to hear how Mrs. Fane is."

Elizabeth opened the yellow envelope, and read:

"Too late. Please come; bring Martha."

"Oh, poor Michael!" said Elizabeth, sitting down.

"Lor', how sudden!" said Martha. "Poor lady! I am really grieved. Shall I get ready to go?"

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "get ready, Nanny, and look out a train. We will go at once."

"Poor Mr. Fane!" echoed Miss Osterley with real feeling. "He will be terribly cut up. His affection for his mother was really beautiful. It made him genuinely care for women's welfare. He is one of the few men who will unselfishly work for their good. I am very sorry. She was a cultivated, broad-minded woman, I hear."

"She was a perfect angel," said Elizabeth, and she went away to pack, with a heavy heart. A tender companion and a link with her childhood had gone from her she knew, but she thought most of Michael.

On the little platform at Ilbury an anxious white face was waiting for her, with heavy blue lines round the eyes. Elizabeth had never seen Michael other than cheerful and

strong, and she took his hand and patted it with a great desire to comfort him.

Martha looked after her box, and Michael and Elizabeth walked away across the fields toward the Mill. The elm-trees were raining their yellow leaves on the damp grass. The country looked very brown and gray and cheerless. A flight of rooks were cawing noisily as they winged toward home. The way was very familiar, and yet everything seemed strangely altered. Michael spoke in short broken sentences, as though afraid to trust himself.

"She was in her garden, 'putting her flowers to bed,' you remember she used to call it, at this time of the year, when she turned giddy and faint, and fell down. The girl heard her and ran out, and called Rawlins, who was working in the kitchen garden, and they carried her in and laid her in the parlor. She never knew any one, and just before I got here she sighed and was gone. It seems so terrible, Elizabeth, to see the place without her. I have never been home that she did not meet me at the gate. I always felt like a boy with her, just the same as years ago. I told her everything, and she always understood."

Elizabeth listened, with a sympathy deepened by her experience of his mother's rare character, and they discussed quietly and naturally all that made her so winning and so wise, until they got to the white gate which opened on the narrow brick-path bordered by the beds where flowers no longer bloomed. Here Michael paused.

"Betty, I have taken rooms at Miss Holdsworth's for you and Martha. I thought you would rather, but please come in now."

She walked up the well-known way she had so often trodden. No blinds were drawn, nor any token of mourning, only the tall motherly figure did not come into the

porch to take her in her arms, and lead her to the low chair where she sat beside her, and questioned her about every interest or difficulty in her life, caring supremely about each little detail.

In the dim light Elizabeth saw the familiar parlor was only slightly re-arranged.

"She lies—upstairs in her own quiet room," said Michael, and then, like a child who could no longer restrain his grief, he bent his head, covered his face, and sobbed.

Elizabeth went to him, put her arm through his, and led him away out into the porch, and there they stood, while she calmed and soothed him with quiet tender words.

Two days later they laid her to rest in a corner of the village churchyard on a cold gray day, and afterward, when Michael and Elizabeth were sitting in his little den at the Mill Farm, he began talking about the place.

"I can never part with it," he said. "Every plant in the garden and every corner of the rooms is filled with her presence. I recollect some little word of hers, or some action wherever I go. I shall keep it; I know she would have wished it."

"It is a place of infinite peace," said Elizabeth. "I —shall always think of it as the dearest spot on earth."

"That's another good reason for keeping it," said Michael with a sad little smile.

Tea was brought in by the maid dressed in black. It was the only sign of conventional mourning, but Martha thought it shocking not to observe these customs of respect, and insisted.

"Put it there by the fire," said Michael. "Betty, will you sit in this low chair so, and pour it out?"

Elizabeth saw it was the place where his mother always made his tea when it was brought to his room, hesitated for a moment, and then obeyed his wish, and the look of

content which came to his worn face was the first indication she had seen that he was comforted.

The day following Elizabeth returned to London. Michael came with her to the station, and as she watched him when the train moved away, she felt it was hard to go. She knew how much he needed her support, and then she thought how strange it was that this strong man, to whom she had always looked for help or guidance, should now cling to her like a child in pain, and her heart went out to him in his hour of weakness.

When Elizabeth returned to Marshom Street the weather was raw and cold. Sally had grown strong again, but she looked pinched and blue. The thin cape was still strained across her shoulders, and her skirt was in rags.

Elizabeth stopped her in the court. She had given her a warm frock and jacket, hoping in this way that she might keep well through the winter, just before she went to Ilbury.

Where were they?

"Please, miss, mother said as the old ones would do very well for every diy, and she took them off to Mr. Cohen's."

"You're cold, Sally, in these wretched things," said Elizabeth, feeling really vexed.

"Oh dear no, miss, I ain't. Billy and I plays cat-in-the-wheel to warm ourselves, and we runs as 'ard as we can down the street, and then we gets a-lookin' in at the winders and a-smellin' the fried fish. I ain't cold."

Two nights after that, a driving wind blew through the court. Shop hours were over, and Sally and Billy sat together on a step eating "roasted pertater." They were laughing over the splendid prize, and eating it slowly to make it last, when a "copper" came up, and before Sally could think or move, Billy was gone. She sat breathless with the potato still in her hand, and late that evening,

after the rain began to fall, Elizabeth found her as she went home after her rounds, a white-faced little ghost haunting the court.

"Kiss me, miss," she said passionately, clinging to her skirt when she finished her story. "They've took 'im awiy, and I'll never see 'im agine."

Next day Elizabeth went to Mrs. Catchpole. She had just come back from Court, and had got her best bonnet out of pawn.

"What did you say?" said Elizabeth, standing before her and speaking severely.

"I said," answered Mrs. Catchpole, "as 'e'd allus been a bad boy; I niver could do nofink with 'im," and here she began to cry in a snivelling way, just as she had no doubt done in Court. "I said as 'e 'as a good 'ome if iver a boy 'ad," she said, rubbing her red face. "And then I tould the gentleman as 'e'd better be in a school, though in course I didn't like partin' with 'im, as 'e was my only boy. That's what I said, miss."

"A pack of lies," said Elizabeth, the light coming into her eyes. "You've been a bad mother, and now he's gone away to a reformatory. I hope when he comes out, he'll go off and earn his living, and have nothing more to do with you. I will take Sally with me," she added, after a moment's thought, "and get her trained. You're not fit to have children."

Mrs. Catchpole was fairly howling.

"It's 'ard, very 'ard," she gasped, "to 'ave the children took and set agin their own mother."

But Sally looked up into Elizabeth's face. Could she mean it, after she had helped Billy to "sneak the pertater"? She put her hand into hers, and said:

"I'll try and mind wot yer siy, see if I don't."

"We'll write and tell Billy," said Elizabeth, "and get leave to go and see him."

"'E won't be starved there, will 'e?" said Sally.

"Not he," but her heart failed her when she thought of the lonely boy. "If he knows you're doing well, he'll try his hardest to get on too," said Elizabeth.

So Sally was installed at the corner house. Martha was somewhat troubled at first, and came to Elizabeth with horrible details as to Sally's condition of personal neglect; but by-and-by she felt invigorated by the presence of some one to whom she could give her orders, and she was reconciled to Sally's presence. And before a week had passed, in answer to Elizabeth's question, she said:

"Well, miss, she may make a servant if she's taught to be thorough."

CHAPTER XXVII

SOME weeks after her return from Ilbury Elizabeth received a telegram from Katherine, asking her to come to her that evening. Lady Hornden met her in the drawing-room, and her welcome was very warm.

"I'm only too glad you have come; I know Katherine wants to see you. She is certainly better than she was," she said in answer to her question, "much more herself. She was out for hours the other day; we were all terribly alarmed when she stayed away so long, but she had been driving about and shopping, and she came home really cheerful. I have been trying to persuade her for ages to go abroad to some warm, sunny place, but she would never hear of it; and now she says she is ready to go anywhere the doctors wish. I can't help thinking," she said, looking wistfully at Elizabeth, "that they are mistaken in thinking her illness is hopeless; don't you think they may be? They are often such alarmists."

"I think it is only the poor, who get to know the whole truth," said Elizabeth. "The rich are either terrified or buoyed up with false hope."

"It's only to me they've spoken so depressingly. They have not told Katherine; she has no idea of it. You will be careful when you see her."

"Indeed I will; but oh, how terrible it is! I am so grieved." And big tears stood in her eyes as she looked at Lady Hornden.

"Dear Miss Maynell," said Lady Hornden, taking her hand, "you will forgive me for saying it, but you are so different from anything I had imagined. I thought of

you as a good-doing, badly-dressed, rather old-maidish girl; but you're so pretty and young, and such a charming hat"; and Lady Hornden turned on Elizabeth her tired eyes, lit by a momentary interest.

"Have I?" said Elizabeth, smiling. "I am very glad. I love pretty things much more than I ought to. It was always a joy to see Lady Cliffe when she came to Marshom Street. She brought so much beauty, it did us all good."

"Yes, she has a charm all her own; she is so merry, and yet—so—so——" Lady Hornden looked about for a word, "so spiritual. I always say she has a rare combination of body and soul, and she always knows just what to say, and what to wear, which gives such a sense of harmony. Poor darling! She has had dreadful troubles"; and she sighed. "I could never have believed that she, who had everything to give, could have been stricken down like this."

Elizabeth had no intention of discussing late events with Lady Hornden, and turned the conversation by asking about winter plans.

"I say Madeira; it is a wonderful climate, and it is right away from all the people who might recall her troubles. And she loves beautiful country; she could sit out all day. I should take a doctor and nurses; and I can't help thinking," she said, and a sort of sunrise of hope came into her face, "that she might get better. After all, the doctors know literally nothing; they are all ignorant; but the only thing they don't know is how little their opinion is worth. I must not keep you," she said, getting up and taking Elizabeth's hand, "you must go to Katherine. She has gone to bed, poor lamb; she was tired out after a long day putting away her things, and tearing letters, and all sorts of tiresome business. So I persuaded her to go to bed and see you in her room. I am changing the nurse; the new one comes to-night."

As she spoke she led the way up the broad staircase, opened the dressing-room door which led into Katherine's and went herself into the room beyond.

"Katherine, darling, I have brought her," Elizabeth heard her say as the door stood ajar. "You never told me she was so pretty; she is charmingly distinguished."

"Tell her to come in," said Katherine. "I want to see her very much."

The room was very large and white, with glittering gilt glasses, and an impression of many things that shone and shimmered. A carved and gilded bed with a draped canopy of white damask and delicate white muslin was the principal object that caught Elizabeth's eye, and lying on a heap of pillows, in the midst of filmy lace, was the golden head and pale face, with its large bright eyes looking eagerly toward the door. Two thin hands were held out, and Elizabeth was kneeling by her and saying little broken tender words.

After the door was closed Katherine raised herself on her elbow, and said:

"Listen to me. I want to talk to you, dear St. Clara, quite plainly; you and I, at any rate, needn't mince matters. I am not going to get well; mama doesn't know it, but I am not. I don't want her troubled, but the doctors all lie. They know very well that I shall not get better. I have found it out for myself. I would so much rather know, and I don't think I am afraid. It seems very odd when I look round to know I am going away from it all, and that the things I have used every day, and all the places where I have been, will remain, and I shall have gone—I don't know where; I'm not like you, I have no ideas about these things."

Elizabeth laid her head down beside her and held her breath. She did not want to cry; she felt it would be hard on Katherine.

"Perhaps it will be just going to sleep; perhaps it will be to travel far and far away to some other world. But that seems to me a lonely thing, I'm not sure I wouldn't sooner just sleep. But I don't want to talk of that, but of things you and I have met together. Dear, I ought to have seen you long ago," and she put her feverish hands into Elizabeth's. "I ought to have told you I was unjust, cruel; but it has been so hard to wake, and find everything was a dream, and such a bad dream too. It was not only that," she added, with scrupulous truth; "it was because I was vexed that I had not been always first. You forgive me, don't you?"

Elizabeth could not speak, she only pressed her hand.

"Now, dear, if he comes back to you after I am gone, could you forgive him? He was mean; but he has had a bitter lesson. Don't you think you could?"

"It isn't a question of forgiving any man," said Elizabeth very low. "I've long ago forgotten the suffering, only this thing has killed my love—it lies dead. Nothing could make it live again."

"Not if he were sorry, and came to you?" pleaded Katherine.

"No, never, never. Trust is the only thing that matters, and if that goes there is nothing left." And, as she said the words, she felt vaguely conscious that there was another reason, the place in her heart was no longer empty. "Don't let us talk about him; let me talk of you."

Katherine lay back. She told Elizabeth of her visit to the hospital.

"Oh, why did you not come to me?" she cried. "I would have gone with you."

"No, no," said Katherine, "it was best I should face it alone. All the big things of life we must face alone; there is nothing in all the world so lonely as a human soul."

"Only because we are imprisoned in this cocoon of a

body," said Elizabeth, "and we can't see and know the host innumerable which is all round us, watching over and helping us."

"Perhaps," said Katherine. "Who can tell that they really exist? But even if they are near us, they are outside our lives, beings different from ourselves, with different ideas and wants and wishes. It's no use, Elizabeth," she said, looking at her with solemn eyes, "when we go into mid-stream, with faces set away from our world, we have to wade alone. First a little way, as I am doing now, just like a child paddling and feeling the first cold, and then, by-and-by, to gasp when it closes round us, until we go deeper, deeper, and then to sink and lie still at the bottom, or reach the strange new shore. Oh, I have thought and thought about it, and it seems to me a dark and grim journey, and I don't know where it leads."

Elizabeth said nothing. She did not try to argue; she had learned some wisdom, and she knew that the intricate machinery of a human soul cannot be roughly handled by rude hands, taken to pieces and put together our way, and told that it will work now. Then she resolved to try and help her if she possibly could, and she said:

"Will you come with me to the pilot who goes out to help more broken, battered human lives than any one else I know, and steers them into safe port?"

Katherine hesitated.

"Is it a clergyman? I hate clergymen," she said. "They are always conceited, and generally narrow-minded."

"You won't hate this one. Don't you remember the old man who was with us in Marshom Street, when you heard them crying the news in the street?"

"Yes, yes," said Katherine. "Father Martin, I remember him, the man with a face like an old saint; yes, I remember. I think I should like to see him with you, only

I want you to promise that if we go to-morrow, you will come back here and stay at least one night under my roof."

* * * * * *

Father Martin sat in his untidy study, with the dust of ages on papers and books. Nothing was to be touched; he wished to clean it himself, he always said; but the time had not yet come when he had the leisure, or the inclination.

Opposite him sat Katherine, dressed in a long cloak lined with ermine, very white, and dazzling against the brown books and shabby furniture. The old face, with its map of wrinkles, marking the many ways along which the soul had travelled, looked on her with a great pity as she told him her sorrowful story.

"You don't wonder, do you," she said when she ended it, "that I have no visions? I have been just a butterfly, but the nip of winter has me in its grasp; and now that I am going to die so soon, I don't know where I am going; I feel I have lost my way. I hear the people talking and laughing round me, and I long to tell them all that I used to laugh too, and never cared what happened to-morrow, until I knew I had to die. I don't know how to explain it; I'm not frightened, but I'm so hopeless."

And then, as though the old man were talking to a child, he tried to show her how there are those whom God Himself leads along strange ways, and yet they never knew that He was leading them at all; that if she would look up, she would see a light on her way she had not known was there, and that this light would make things clear and plain—would lighten all the world, so that she could see clearly. He showed her how her returning sense of loyalty had been a retracing of her footsteps back into the path where light shone; and that the very love which had come into her life was a fragment of the great love of which she was a part, for only by love can we know God.

"But it is too late now; I have lived all my life."

"No, it is beginning," he said, "just beginning. The Angel of Life has met you sooner than he meets most of us, and on the very threshold of your earthly life he has come to take you quickly into the open way. For you there is to be no time when the 'keeper of the strong house shall tremble,' no 'darkening of the windows,' no years when the grasshopper becomes a burden." And then gently he led her up that mountain where earthly eyes see things heavenly, in the light that transforms pleasure and pain alike, and turns both to joy, and where in the God-man we see humanity transfigured, and realize its relation to God.

Katherine listened wistfully; as he talked to her, some ray of hope flitted fitfully through her heart. If it could be true for her—if she could find the light she longed for, with the passionate desire of the blind.

"Teach her," he prayed, before they parted, "to trust, and know no fear; to fear Thee only, so that she may keep nothing back from Thee, and then to love Thee, with all fear cast out."

"As you now share the crown of thorns," he said, as he bade her good-by, "so shall it become a crown of glory."

Katherine was very silent as they drove back to Hill Street.

"I am tired," she said.

"You must go straight to your bed," said Elizabeth. She knew she longed to be alone.

"You are going to stay with me—you won't leave me to-night?"

"No; I will stay with you as long as you want me."

"That's right; I want you more than your slummies do, now."

Katherine lay very still when she was once more in her

bed. The room was dim, and the house quiet. She thought of all Father Martin told her.

"If I could be sure it was all true," she said. "I would not mind if Jack would only send me some message."

Her hand hung over the side of the bed. Presently there was a rustling sound; something came toward her. Something cold touched her hand; she started with a stifled cry, and then looked down. Nip's rugged head was rubbed against her; the faithful brown eyes looked up to hers.

"Nip, old boy—Jack's dog—I haven't seen you since he went away," and she kissed his shaggy coat, while her tears fell fast. "Did he send you to comfort me?" she asked. And for answer his tail beat against the bed with joy.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE train would start in a few minutes. A group of friends clustered round the saloon carriage. Lady Hornden stood on the platform shaking hands and saying many good-bys. Katherine sat at the window serene and smiling.

Elizabeth was to travel with her to Southampton; she wished to say good-by to her on the boat.

They saw the last of Jack at this very station, Katherine thought, as she looked at the grimy arches and the hurrying crowds, and here they will see the last of me.

She heard Sir James's voice saying, in answer to Lady Hornden's question:

"Madeira, my dear lady, I don't believe there's a drop of really fine Madeira in the world now. You have a little in your cellar, but it's as rare as a hen's tooth."

Then Mr. Farningham came to the window.

"Oh, my dear Lady Cliffe, I envy you the sunshine and the *joie de vivre* of that heavenly country. How well you will be, and how blooming you will look, when you come back. And you must promise me you will always wear mauve, the same shade you wore last year at Windsor; it is the most exquisite thing with your coloring, it makes you look like mother-of-pearl."

"Oh, don't let's discuss that; when I come back my dress will probably be a surprise to everybody." And Katherine's face for a moment resumed its old mocking look.

"I really almost think I shall take a steamer, and come out, if the fogs are bad."

"Well, if London is unbearable, try us as a last resource."

Mr. Farningham did not care for jokes which he did not make himself; he was always in dread lest somehow he might be made ridiculous before he was aware of it, and he turned to Lady Hornden. Anne took his place.

"Good-by," she said, holding Katherine's hand. "How we shall miss you."

"For ten minutes," said Katherine, "I think you will; just as long as it takes to drive to Bond Street, and then you will get quite accustomed, and not miss me at all, and that will be wholesome and good and as it should be."

"Come back quite well, dear old thing; that is the only really important thing. It's not true; every one will miss you; you have hardly got an enemy in the world."

"Oh, that's because I've lost at every game, and never done any one a good turn. If you put people under obligations you can make enemies as you force cucumbers; you take a great deal of trouble, and they cost you very dear."

Katherine was looking very white and tired, and Elizabeth saw how much the effort of her affected gayety was costing her.

"Good-by," cried Lady Hornden, as the guard told her to take her seat. "We shall come back quite well; you will see what a success Madeira will be. How much we shall want to see you all. *Au revoir, au revoir,*" as the train began slowly to move out.

"Good-by," said Katherine, "good-by."

The great gray ship was moored opposite the platform when the train stopped. Piles of luggage, with as many stripes of color as Joseph's coat, were heaped on the station. Anxious people were bustling round, calm people were walking up and down, sad people were crying, happy people laughing. Katherine neither laughed nor cried.

When the gangway joined England to the floating kingdom which was for a little while to be their country, she walked across it with head erect, and only when she reached the deck she whispered to Elizabeth:

"I've trodden on old England's soil for the last time."

Then ensued a perfect hurricane of preparation. A box was missing. Lady Hornden was in despair; everything else could well be lost but this one. More lamentations, then anxiety was turned once more to ease—the box was found, said the grave servant. Air cushions, bags, books, flowers, were all sorted and conveyed to the deck stateroom. Two maids and two nurses ran and fetched and carried. The doctor, a quiet young man in a gray ulster, took Lady Cliffe to her cabin on the upper deck, sent for a nurse, and ordered her to bed; and, indeed, she looked as though the nervous strain was almost to breaking point.

"Will you send for me when you are settled?" said Elizabeth, who went back to help Lady Hornden.

"Oh, my dear! what these days have been. The preparation, the anxiety, the worries—*Non, ma chere, je ne change pas ma robe ce soir, on dine en toilette de ville aujourd'hui, c'est de rigueur*"—to a French maid. "Oh, what was I saying?—yes, the work has been untold. Well, if only——" and she looked at Elizabeth; "but I am sure it will; I have a presentiment that this is the step which will give her new life."

Elizabeth wondered as she thought of the truth she, in common with so many of us, unconsciously uttered.

"Her ladyship is ready for you," said the nurse who came to fetch her.

Elizabeth walked into the large stateroom, hideous with plaster bas reliefs of undressed men and women, who seemed uncomfortably to realize their ill-drawn indecency, glaring coloring, and expensive woodwork.

In the midst of the inappropriate surroundings lay

Katherine. Her presence made all the bad taste insignificant; she looked so transparently, ethereally white, the gold of her hair the only note of color, except the large wondering blue eyes.

"Come and tuck me up, dear, dear St. Clara," she said, "and kiss me good-night, as children say; and pray that you and I may be together again somewhere, some day."

The tramp of feet on the deck was as an on-marching army; voices calling, and shrill questions as to rooms and luggage. Elizabeth could hardly steady her thoughts, but Katherine seemed to hear nothing. Already the tide was carrying her out beyond the voices of the world.

"Kiss me again, and again," she said.

Elizabeth bent over the bed where she lay; it seemed to her fancy as the cot of a little child.

"The first gong," said the steward to the nurse who stood outside. "The next one, all visitors must go on shore."

"Only a moment more," said Katherine. "Listen, I want to say if there is another life for me, and I am worthy, and if I am allowed, I will try to help your work from yonder; that will perhaps redeem some of my wasted time. Tell Mr. Fane I am glad he told me the truth. Does he love you, dear? I am sure he is a good man." Then after a moment's pause she added: "Tell Father Martin I think I shall see light."

"Light is love," said Elizabeth, holding her in her arms; and when the clashing sound rang out again she laid her down, and was gone. As she stood near the gangway she met Lady Hornden.

"Good-by, dearest," she said; and she kissed her on both cheeks. "We shall be back with the spring," but her voice faltered a little.

And then Elizabeth crossed back to the shore, and the grating sound of the engine which raises the anchor

ground out its harsh note. Tiers of human beings lined the vessel's cloistered sides, all waiting, full of hope or of sadness, of joy or of regret. The great heart of the liner was throbbing with humanity's emotion. Then the mighty ship lifted up her voice, and her funnels gave out the hoarse note of farewell, and slowly, solemnly, irrevocable as death, she turned oceanward; gently, imperceptibly, she moved away from her moorings, farther and farther from any possibility of return.

The winter sun was shining low and red in the afternoon sky, making a pathway of gold upon the waters. Soon the great city of the deep was taken into the golden glory.

"She has gone out into the light," thought Elizabeth; and she felt that the imprisoned spirit had found what it sought, as she put out to sea. Then she saw no more, for her eyes were dim with tears.

The train would start in ten minutes for London, one of the officials of the Southampton line told her. She walked along the quay, thinking to catch one more glimpse of the ship. A man's tall figure stood outlined against the sky; he too was watching, shading his eyes with his hand, and then, when he could see no more, turned, and Elizabeth stood face to face with Eric.

"I came," he said, "to see her off. I thought, perhaps, even at the last moment, she might ask for me." The tears ran down his cheeks; he did not try to wipe them away. "You will understand all I am going through, you have such a splendid sympathy."

Elizabeth was really sorry, and tried to say some words of comfort. He seemed so utterly broken, she had not the heart to let him return alone, and so he journeyed back with her to London.

She told him of Katherine's courage and self-command. He listened intently as he grew calmer.

"That is like her," he said; "she has the self-restraint of perfect breeding."

Then Elizabeth spoke of her unselfish desire to please her mother, the only motive which had taken her so far from home.

"I am not sure," said Eric. "I sometimes think," and he spoke eagerly, "she wants to try me still, to see if I can stand this test. I believe, you know, she does still really care, but she hides it from everybody. She has such pride of will."

Should she undeceive him, or let his poor vanity staunch its wound with these flimsy lies? Elizabeth wondered. He talked on, of his past happiness, of all he had endured.

"You were quite right in all you said to me in Marshom Street; I see it now. I behaved abominably, but, by God! I have suffered for that one lapse, as few suffer for a crime."

Then he returned to the possibility of Katherine's relenting. He was sure she would get well, if her mind was at rest. As he talked he grew happier; then he turned to Elizabeth, and, taking a long look at her, he said:

"Can you forgive me? You have suffered, and it has been my fault." He was sitting opposite to her, and he bent forward and took her hand. "I must tell you now—I may never have another opportunity, your memory has been enshrined in the deepest recesses of my heart. I carried it like some holy thing into danger, and I always knew your prayers surrounded me, and guarded me. You will believe that, won't you? Oh, my dear, dear little girl, you have done far more for my life than you will ever know. Will you tell me that I have still a place in your heart?"

"No," said Elizabeth, looking steadily at him with her true fearless eyes. "Your place is gone; another has it now."

Eric looked bewildered.

"Was it possible," he thought. "Who could it be? That brutal boor, Fane, I suppose. Poor Elizabeth, what have I driven her to? I have been cruel."

When they reached Victoria they parted, and as Elizabeth's cab rattled eastward, she thought that Katherine, who had sailed away toward the light, had after all the better part, for life was often an ugly, sordid thing.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE garden on either side of the paved path that led to the long, low house was gay with flowers. Blue delphiniums and Madonna lilies, monthly roses and mignonettes, bright eschscholtzias and dwarf snap-dragons, delicate columbines and sweet-smelling stocks, massed in a glorious profusion. White butterflies flitted across the vivid green lawn, and a purple clematis had thrown its arms across the porch, royal in color, and lavish in its wealth of blossom.

In the sunshine lay a pink and white bundle. Sometimes the pink moved, and little arms fought upwards, and tiny feet kicked out toward the sky. They were promptly covered by the careful hand of Sally, who sat holding a white umbrella over the bundle with patient care. Sally, dressed in a cotton frock, with a clean apron, and her hair tightly plaited and drawn away from her face.

The sound of children's voices came from the orchard, shouting at their play. The white curtains flapped in the breeze through the open casements, making a gentle monotonous flutter, like a sail on a calm day.

Presently an upper window was thrown wide open.

"Is he sleeping, Sally?" came Elizabeth's voice.

"No, 'e ain't, but I think as 'e's goin' to," said Sally, looking up.

"Bless his darling little heart," said Elizabeth, and in the cadence of her voice was the music only learned by those who are happy.

"You'd better get the children in, or dinner will be cold," said the warning voice of Martha from a lower region.

"I will call them," she said, and by-and-by the tall figure in a pink cotton gown was speeding toward the orchard.

The children were picking armfuls of flowers, shaky grass, and yellow dandelions, and moon daisies.

"Nance," said one, pausing with a big dandelion clock in his hand, "I just loves Mrs. Elizabeth."

"So der I," said Nance, standing in front of Dan, ready to blow when the word was spoken.

"Come to dinner; come to dinner," called Elizabeth, with the sun shining on her at the gate. And with shrieks of happy laughter they trooped back to the house, where Martha stood, spoon in hand, behind a bowl of soup, her face a little older, her hair a little whiter, but serene and content.

Dinner over, they pressed round Elizabeth.

"Tell us a story. Do, please, please do." And she sat down on the grass with the sleeping baby in her arms, and rocked him to and fro, while Sally cleared the dinner things.

"A story—what sort?"

"'Bout soldiers," said a boy.

"About lidies," said a girl with a shaggy fringe.

"No, about firies," said another, "them wot dances in the night, and makes weddin' rings in the grawst."

"Tell us about hingels," said another.

Elizabeth looked at the baby, and then she told the children to come very softly and see him asleep.

"The angels are whispering to him," she said; "all day long they keep their wings folded round him. Their touch has been on his cheek, their breath on his little pink face. They will play with him when he wakes, and make him smile. The whole world is fanned by their beautiful wings; and how busy they are in heaven helping God to keep the children from harm."

Then she looked at the eager circle, and the tears dimmed her eyes, as she said:

"Some day, perhaps, he will grow up, and the world will hide them from him, but I pray not. But they are with you, just as they are with him, even when you have no longer the grass and the flowers to speak to you of God's beautiful goodness; the angels will be with you on the doorsteps and in the court. They won't leave you, children, you belong to them."

The sound of the lifting of the gate-latch made her look up. A man's figure stood between the flower borders. Elizabeth went toward him with the baby in her arms.

"Oh, Michael, I did not think you would come back so soon." And she held out the sleeping child to him. "Take him," she said, "that I may put my arms round you."

He stooped and kissed her face, and took the baby, and together, with arms entwined, they stood looking at the tiny form. And then they smiled at one another, as those only can who understand each other's hearts.

"I've good news, Betty. Bill has come out of the reformatory, and he will be here to-morrow."

"Sally," called Elizabeth, "do you hear? Bill will come to-morrow."

After one shriek of joy, Sally ran indoors to tell Martha.

Michael looked across the garden to where the children played. They were tired of waiting, and were playing the game, Nuts in May.

"They go to-morrow," said Elizabeth, following his eyes. "Then the old people come. Oh, Michael, I'm so glad we needn't keep happiness all to ourselves, but that we can make a house of joy for others. Isn't it good? Listen, I hear bells," she said, pausing suddenly. "Why are they pealing?"

"Errington brings home his American wife to-day, with

all her bags of dollars." A shadow passed across her face. "Does it hurt you, Betty?" said Michael.

"Hurt me! how should it? My life is filled and blest. I was thinking of Katherine and all her pain."

"It seems to her but a slight affliction now," said Michael, "for she and I have both found light."

"And I have found love," said Elizabeth.

THE END

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